

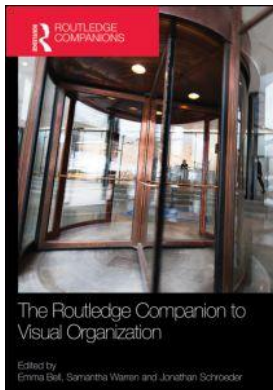
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### Portraiture and the construction of 'charismatic leadership'

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# Portraiture and the construction of 'charismatic leadership'

*Beatriz Acevedo*

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The leader rests on his luxurious chair, his piercing eyes looking at the viewer. He is a mature, strong man; his experience and wisdom impress the viewer who is captured by his inquisitive gaze. In this portrait, he looks severe, and his competitors know it: he is not a man to play with. His clothes are carefully chosen, exquisite garments of Italian craft. Holding an item of the latest technology, one can see his command on the latest technology and his high level of education. Indeed, the elements of this portrait show a strong man, a charismatic leader able to lead us all to that hopeful future.

This description can be applied to a contemporary picture of a multinational CEO posing in his office; and it may be indeed the case of this portrait of Pope Innocent X, painted by Spanish painter Diego Velázquez in 1650. At the time, Innocent X was the equivalent of the CEO of, perhaps, one of the first global corporations in the competitive market of faith and religion. In spite of the historical distance, similar elements in the depiction of leadership can be found in the contemporary portraits of business leaders: a particular pose of the body, showing strength and confidence; the latest brand of computers placed in office settings of alluring interior design in a composition carefully organized to have a desired effect. In both cases, the intention of the image is clear: to reveal the power and charisma of the individual portrayed.

As argued by Guthey and Jackson, images of contemporary leaders like CEOs are 'produced and disseminated by commercial organizations, and many seek to convey a visual impression of commercial organizations themselves' (2005: 1057). Even though the media is very different to the oil and canvas of the portrait of the Pope, the main elements in the depiction of power seem to remain throughout the centuries. Examining portraits as a particular kind of 'text' can provide some interesting insights regarding the understanding of 'leadership' and its representation through images.

During the history of Western art, the link between portraits and status or power has been widely documented. Commissioned portraits have been traditionally the privilege of certain groups and individuals occupying positions of authority (West 2004). The possibility of understanding portraits as a tool for what Weber has called the 'routinization of charisma' offers an interesting avenue to link portraits and the field of leadership studies. The term 'charisma'

applies to 'a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specific powers or qualities' (Weber 1968: 48). This chapter aims at presenting some elements of the analysis of portraiture as a form of art that can illuminate the understanding of leadership in contemporary organizational studies. It follows the growing field of organizational aesthetics (Strati 1999; Linstead and Höpfl 2000); vision in organizational studies (Warren 2002; Acevedo and Warren 2012) and some ideas of aesthetic leadership (Taylor and Hansen 2005).

The questions inspiring this chapter include:

- How can portraiture reveal aspects of leadership in Western cultures?
- Which notions of leadership are highlighted through portraits in contemporary culture?
- What are the contributions of art history in the analysis of images of leadership?

In order to address these questions, this chapter presents a brief summary of how portraiture can be an instrument for what has been called the 'routinization of charisma' and how Western leaders throughout history have used portraits and images as a way of extending, disseminating and asserting their power. The second part sets out an analytical framework to understand images drawing upon Guthey and Jackson's (2005, 2008) work on CEO portraits, and including some aspects from art history that can expand the way in which images of leaders can be understood. The third part of the chapter concerns the main aspects of a critical approach to the images in relation to a visual genealogy, which allows the viewer to reveal the mechanisms of power and image underlying the presentation of images in certain contexts and historical periods. Some examples comparing the portrait of Pope Innocent X by Diego Velázquez and some contemporary photographs of business leaders will be presented in order to illustrate this approach. Finally, the chapter will offer some conclusions and further suggestions on the intersections between art history frameworks to understand the construction of particular forms of leadership.

## Portraits of power

A portrait is a work of art that represents the features or likeness of a unique individual. As a work of art, a portrait is also influenced by certain aesthetic conventions and the social expectations of a particular time and place (West 2004: 22). When analysing a portrait, it is important to take into account not only the imagination of the artist, the technique involved and the modality, but also the perceived social role of the sitter and the qualities emphasized in the portrait according to convention, status, hierarchy and political intent. In Western cultures, images of rulers have become a powerful tool for political domination. This tradition was inaugurated by Alexander the Great, as a way of being present in every corner of his vast empire:

Alexander's face was the most influential in history. His artists constructed a multifaceted image of the ruler, his dealing with friend and foe, his place in history, and his relationship with the divine that was unprecedented in its richness and diversity. They inaugurated not only the multiple commemoration of the myriad 'worthies' of the Hellenistic world and Rome, but the genres of charismatic ruler portraiture and royal narrative in the West.

*(Stewart 1993: 55)*

Alexander's portraits represent a concrete testimony to his power, since they serve both to establish the identity of the sovereign and to consolidate that authority by making his

appearance omnipresent. It can be said also that this use of portraits represents a new means of depicting and transmitting ideas about ‘charisma’ and ‘power’ (Stewart 1993). Portraiture had a particular social meaning, normally conveying a number of symbols, meanings and moral messages in the depiction of sitters and their institutional position. As a power tool, portraiture had been the exclusive privilege of those who held a prominent position in society, the court or the Church, normally depicting the figure’s social status or institutional worth (Bürger 2007). When analysing portraits, it is important to consider both the ‘body’ of the sitter, but also his ‘status’ as part of an institutional regime. As Mariana Jenkins has stated in her groundbreaking work on portraiture: ‘[its] primary purpose is not the portrayal of an individual as such, but the evocation through his (*sic*) image of those abstract principles for which he (*sic*) stands’ (1947: 1).

Portraits act as signifiers of the status of the individuals and institutions represented. They convey certain symbols of power and status, expressed through gestures, dress, props, the background, etc., thus they serve a clear political and social function. The use of certain symbols also corresponds to particular historical periods, where the meanings can be easily understood. For instance, in order to understand the portrait of Innocent X, we need to consider the wider socio-political context dominated by the instructions of the Catholic Church who held a tight grip on the way in which images should be constructed. The [Trento] Council’s *Decree on the Invocation, Veneration, and Relics of Saints, and on Sacred Images* was held as the main strategy against the competition posed by Protestants, thus, visual images were tools for ‘instructing the mind and elevating the spirit’ and the act of artistic creation was interpreted almost as a form of religious worship (Véliz 2002: 11–12). Such deification is transferred to the figure of the rulers – both monarchs associated with the Catholic Church or high officers in Rome – as part of a complex political game. For example, King Philip IV, the most powerful monarch of the time, and a close associate of Pope Innocent X, used portraiture as a way of exerting his authority in the recently colonized New World. Such was the power of his image that the elites of the viceroyalty of Peru took oaths of loyalty and adoration for the king in a highly charged ceremony where a portrait of the king, framed in gold and ‘seated’ on a throne beneath a canopy, presided over the ritual (Feros 2002). Nowadays, British embassies and some offices of the Commonwealth exhibit the portrait of Queen Elizabeth II as a powerful symbol of their allegiance to the monarch.

The use of portraits for political purposes is widely exemplified by the use of visual imagery produced by the Habsburg dynasty in Europe (Wheatcroft 1996). Emperor Maximilian continued the Hellenistic tradition of Alexander the Great, by commissioning artists such as Albrecht Dürer for his ‘marketing’ campaign (Silver 2008). Applying early techniques of mass production through woodcuts, the ‘image’ of the leader was available for popular consumption. In these portraits, Maximilian’s distinctive features were normally fused with the attributes of saintly or revered figures, thus linking him as an individual with an ideal type (Silver 2008: 23). For Maximilian and the lineage of the Habsburgs, imperial publicity through paintings, woodcuts and poems became a ‘*raison d’être*’: they provided the general public presentation of the emperor and the routinization of his charisma, while simultaneously being aimed at gaining popular support for their policies. Charles V, King of Spain, had in Titian one of his most important allies in his political agenda. Titian distanced his portraits from Dürer’s depiction of the Emperor as a Christian knight; instead, he portrayed Charles V as a Majestic, Universal Emperor and Crusader, but also as a Prince of Peace (Wheatcroft 1996: 104).

Apart from the political purposes of portraiture illustrated above, its prevalence in Western culture can be explained by the fact that this type of art tends to flourish in regimes that grant privilege to the notion of the individual over that of the collective (West 2004: 17). The Renaissance in Western Europe was a period of increased self-consciousness, in which concepts of individual

identity began to be represented and verbalized (Greenblatt 1984). The focus on the individual gained prominence during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; consequently, portraiture flourished during that period both as an artistic practice and as a cultural commodity.

The importance of portraiture in depicting authority and status continued well into the eighteenth century and the first part of the nineteenth century. During this period, the visual conventions and language may have varied. For instance, the eighteenth-century English artist Sir Joshua Reynolds used to depict his sitters in the poses of ancient sculpture following the old masters, adding grandeur and 'charisma' to the people represented (Allard and Rosenblum 2007). By using certain gestures and timeless costumes, these paintings addressed 'mythical' characteristics associated with heroes and charismatic leaders throughout history.

With changes in social and economic contexts, merchants, traders and bankers began to commission portraits as a celebration of their growing status and power, and portraits became an important instrument in the formation of the bourgeois identity (West 2004). In fact, each historical period favours certain ways of characterizing and depicting leadership and status. From the theatrical poses of Van Dyck, for example, the eighteenth-century rulers in Britain favoured the commission of portraits in domestic settings and displaying the family's attributes, while providing a moral example (Schama 1988).

This variety in the possibilities of portraiture may have influenced artists in their choices of representing their own realities. By the nineteenth century, artists were approaching portraits as a means of their own expression, rather than of the representation of an exclusive group of people. Impressionism used portraits for their experiments into light, as well as other explorations regarding form and volume. Cézanne painted his wife as a way of deconstructing the figure towards a more essential form; Matisse approached portraits in his experiments of explosive colour; and Picasso used the human figure to establish his cubist language (Allard and Rosenblum 2007). Although portraiture was somehow neglected in favour of abstract expressions during the first half of the twentieth century, images were widely used to depict authority and charisma. For instance, the Fascist and Nazi regimes used aesthetics extensively in their rise to power (Spotts 2003). Falasca-Zamponi (1997) emphasizes the symbolic aspects of the Fascist regime concerning the 'sacralization' of politics, and the use of visual images to reinforce its message. In this regard, Walter Benjamin argued that, in the age of mechanical reproduction, 'the total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice [-] politics' (1973: 224).

As well as the political aspects of portraits, it is important to consider the intention of the portrait and how the composition will be read by certain audiences. For instance, the portrait of Innocent X emphasized the luxurious clothes appropriate to his status, whereas a portrait of a modern CEO may stress certain colours or settings, depending on the intention: thus, a modern office with a view to a modern capital of the world may emphasize the institution's global power; while a frontal pose may highlight the 'authenticity' of the leader's profile. As argued by Guthey and Jackson 'top executive portraits now appear so commonplace that they have become hidden in plain sight, with the result that scholars of management, organization and leadership have not explored the issues they raise in any depth' (2005: 1058). They suggest looking at visions of leadership, not as metaphors, but as actual images, such as portraits, as a source for enquiry about leadership in contemporary organizations.

### Portraits and the routinization of charisma

Weber, in his seminal study of sources of authority, identified 'charisma' as a way of exercising power, alongside tradition and legal rational frameworks. The importance of this notion

in defining leadership is matched also with the wide range of views held about how charisma should be defined and from where it originates (Ladkin 2006: 166). For Yukl, traits and behaviours explain how a charismatic leader influences the attitudes and behaviour of followers by, among others:

articulating an appealing vision, using strong, expressive forms of communication when articulating the vision, taking personal risks and making self-sacrifices to attain the vision, communicating high expectations, managing follower impressions of the leader, building identification with the group of organization, and empowering followers.

(2002: 244)

In modern leadership studies, the concept of charisma continues to be a subject for analysis, although Weber's view has been revised and adapted to contemporary organizational and social settings (Bryman 1992; Conger and Kanungo 1988). As summarized by Ladkin (2006), charisma remains a key notion in leadership studies. Further, the literature on charismatic leadership identifies self-image and self-presentation as two key dispositional elements in the construction of leadership (Sosik *et al.* 2002). *Self-image* is the articulation of traits and characteristics perceived in association to the self. These traits can be expressed in relation to others by *self-presentation* as a set of ways and means to monitor and control expressive behaviour – self-monitoring – and employ behavioural strategies to regulate one's identity – also known as impression management (Schlenker 1985). The use of certain clothes, words, institutional symbols and other means can contribute to the construction of the leader's identity. Portraits, thus, are the ideal place to show these elements aimed at impressing a particular audience: followers, competitors, customers or stakeholders. These strategies help create a charismatic relationship between the leader and follower (e.g. attributions of charisma) by influencing dispositional, perceptual and motivational aspects of the follower/audience (Sosik *et al.* 2002: 221).

The stress on the individual aspects of leadership, as popularized by portraiture in Western art, evidences the accepted notion of leadership as an individual trait (Taylor 1989; Greenblatt 1984; Grint 2007). Although the notion of charisma has been 'watered down' to cohere with contemporary renderings (Beyer 1999) and it is possible to argue that charismatic leadership is normally associated with the notion of the 'great man', Ladkin (2006) contests this individual approach to leadership by noting that the emphasis on a psychological paradigm for researching charisma (as opposed to a sociological one) has resulted in an overemphasis on individual traits of 'the leader' without sufficiently accounting for the impact of context on this phenomenon. She suggests instead considering charismatic leadership as a 'relational encounter', in which contextual factors are acknowledged.

A contrasting view on traditional views on leadership is advanced by Michel Foucault in his consideration of power, not as the privilege of a single individual or group, but as a form of energy omnipresent in society: '[it] is the moving substrate of force relations, which by virtue of their inequality constantly engender states of power' (1978: 93). Foucault's main question is to explore how power is exercised through complex *dispositifs*. Following this view, it would be possible to consider portraiture a 'dispositif of power' for the visual representation of charisma and status. Indeed, Weber acknowledged that charisma is only possible when it is 'perceived' as such by followers. Following Foucault's views, it is possible to understand portraits, such as those of Alexander, as a new 'technology of power serving as testimony of an overwhelming power' (Stewart 1993: 60).

This brief review of art scholarship and portraiture evidences the strong relationship between portraiture and the 'routinization of charisma', and how this association has varied across

historical periods. For instance, it is interesting to note that leadership is normally depicted in the form of individuals' adopting certain poses or visual configurations. This also may be understood within the conceptualization of leadership as charisma, focused on the characteristics of 'the great man'. In leadership studies, the great man theory holds that legitimacy resides in the greatness of the man, in his being great (Harter 2008: 70). A similar understanding of leadership seems to have been adopted by classic portraiture concerning the depiction of individuals with certain status or charisma.

In the context of leadership studies, specifically, attention has shifted from the personal characteristics of leaders (trait theory) towards more relational aspects of leadership and its development (Marturano and Gosling 2008). Bryman (2004) identifies two standing aspects in the evolution of leadership research: first, the methodological diversity in leadership studies and, second, a greater optimism regarding the potentialities of leadership as a practice. He mentions the increasing use of qualitative methods and the bridging of leadership studies with other disciplines, such as organizational symbolism and cultural studies (Turner 1990). From the work by Moore and Beck (1984) in their research into metaphorical imagery among bank managers towards the rising interest in the use of storytelling (Cuno 2005) and dramaturgy in leadership development (Gardner and Avolio 1998), as well as the increasing number of articles stressing the potentialities of an aesthetic approach in both developing leadership and exploring its meaning (Bligh and Schyns 2007), the theoretical and methodological landscape seems ripe for exploring newer and more daring connections between leadership and other areas such as art and painting.

In recent years, scholars and researchers have suggested enhancing the understanding of leadership by including an aesthetic approach (Hansen *et al.* 2007) considering the sensorial aspects of the exercise of leadership. In particular, Ropo and Parviainen (2001) suggest that leadership work is largely a matter of embodied performance aimed at rendering visible traits of credibility and trustworthiness. Some others have suggested concentrating on the formation of a 'vision' as a key trait for ideological and charismatic leadership (Mumford *et al.* 2007; Avolio and Gardner 1999). Topics such as 'the articulation of a clear vision', the leader as 'visionary', the 'clairvoyant' talents of a leader, etc. seem to confirm the 'visual turn' in organizational studies (Styhre 2010). On the other hand, Guthey and Jackson (2008) challenge the metaphorical aspects of vision as the 'picture in our heads', inviting us to 'look at the pictures in front of our eyes as well'. The following section considers some elements from art history in the interpretation of portraits.

### Analysing portraits: a framework

Taking into account the generous tradition of portraiture in Western art, it is possible to say that art history frameworks may contribute to the study of social and organizational phenomena such as leadership. Guthey and Jackson, drew upon Baxandall's (1986, 1988) pioneering work of art history and interpretation. Baxandall said that

if we wish to explain pictures, in the sense of expounding them in terms of their historical causes, what we actually explain seems likely to be not the unmediated picture but the picture as considered under a partially interpretative description.

(1986: 11)

It is nevertheless possible to suggest a framework for interpreting portraits following the framework proposed by Guthey and Jackson (2008) in their analysis of CEOs' portraits. For them,

portraits are 'complex forms of visual communication, interaction, and conflict over the representation of individual leaders and business leadership writ large'. In their view, images of leaders are representational conventions aiming to produce meaning. Indeed, 'photograph is already in itself a holistic reading of reality ... it isolates fragments of surrounding reality and reproduces them with their particular visual language' (Strati 1997: 315). Guthey and Jackson (2008) argue that visual images function as complex sites of social struggle over meaning and that CEO portraits should be understood as complex forms of visual communication, interaction and conflict over the representation of individual leaders and business leadership at large. Further, they say that a focus on visual images also makes clear that all approaches to image involve interpretation, and that no interpretation enjoys a monopoly of meaning. Quoting Rosenblum (1978), they add that not only the content of visual images, but also their aesthetic and stylistic aspect can be understood productively as forms of social process and interaction.

In order to reveal the connections of how images of leadership are produced, as well as how their meaning is socially constructed within a particular context of power configuration, it is important to enquire about the 'visual genealogy' of such images (Schroeder 2002). In other words, a visual genealogy aims at revealing how certain images of leadership are constructed as a form of exercising power following certain aesthetic conventions in particular historical periods. Guthey and Jackson investigate these conventions through the analytical categories of frame, gaze and period eye, expounding a most specific way of addressing this visual genealogy. As they suggest:

The concept of frame foregrounds the multiple ways in which images can be viewed. The concept of gaze highlights the interaction of multiple viewing subjects within any given image. The notion of period eye places limits on the potential meanings these active subjects can produce by specifying the context-bound habits, skills, and predispositions that influence image production and consumption.

(2008: 85)

In their analysis, the category of *frame* refers to an 'objective' representation. In this case, it concerns the depiction of Innocent X: the pictorial techniques, the use of colours, textures and patterns, and the configuration of certain elements on the canvas surface. Further, this category should consider the technical aspects present in the productive process of the painting (Benjamin 1973).

Second, the *gaze* refers to a socially constructed event mediated by the intersection of gazes between the viewer and the painting. This *gaze* is produced by the exchange of meanings, located in a language that 'speaks' to the different parts. For Guthey and Jackson, *gazes* subjectify: the concept emphasizes the active looking that must occur in and around an image to produce meaning. Such an exchange of meanings – the unveiling of significances, resonances and emotions – is determined by certain 'ways of seeing' (Berger 1972).

Finally, the construction of meaning is related to what Baxandall (1988) has called the 'period eye', referring to some of the mental equipment through which a person orders his/her visual experience. The equipment is 'variable and culturally relative, in the sense of being determined by the society which has influenced his experience'. Consequently, the painter responds to his/her public's visual capacity. Baxandall develops the theme: '[w]hatever [the artist's] own specialized professional skills, he is himself a member of the society he works for and shares its visual experience and habit' (1988: 40). The artist does not act in isolation; his/her actions respond to influences and forces, questions and demands, themselves in turn determined by a wider



configuration of power relationships. Baxandall also suggests that the artist actually responds to a particular market or *truc*, in which certain institutions, authorities or instances validate or acknowledge the artist's work. For some painters, it may be their patrons; for others, the art market or the art critic.

In addition to Guthey and Jackson's approach to the 'period eye', it is important to consider how the visual experience is actually regulated by power mechanisms. Rose (2007: xv) reminds us that there is no such thing as an 'innocent picture'; thus, the interpretation of visual images must address questions of cultural meaning and power. In other words, the category of 'period eye' must also include the deciphering of a 'visual genealogy', aimed at revealing the cultural significance, social contexts and power relationships in which portraits are embedded.

In summarizing, Guthey and Jackson's categories for the analysis of portraits may be represented as in Table 7.1.

Using this framework, Acevedo (2011) advances a comparison between two paintings of Pope Innocent X as depicted by Diego Velázquez in 1650 and Francis Bacon in 1950. Using this example as a basis, the next section will illustrate how this framework can be used to understand the construction of charismatic leadership in different historical periods.

### Analysing Velázquez's portrait of Pope Innocent X

*Frame:* In 1649, Velázquez began painting the portrait of Innocent X, soon after the former had arrived in Rome as part of the diplomatic mission sent by King Philip IV of Spain. Although Innocent X was in his sixty-seventh year when he sat for Velázquez, he really does not show such an advanced age in the painting. In the portrait, Innocent X is not a benevolent leader; rather, he looks more like a watchful man, very efficient in the conduct of his office (Brown 1986: 199). His prominent head crowned by the red cap (*camauro*) denotes intelligence and authority; his hands appear relaxed under the *manteletta* and are covered in exquisitely shimmering lace. On one of his hands, the commanding ring of authority gleams in sole splendour; in the other hand, the Pope holds a folded piece of paper, a document, a token of the endemic bureaucracy of which the Pope is the absolute Head. The document is a prayer made by the painter in petition regarding this portrait: *Alla Santa di Nro. Sigre Inocencio Xo. per Diego de Silva Velázquez*

Table 7.1 Categories for the analysis of portraits

Category of analysis	Definition	Elements
Frame	Objective description, includes the composition and the technical devices used by the artist	The Figure (as in Deleuze's analysis) and the body Technical aspects
Gaze	Subjective construction of meaning, created by the intersection of an 'intention' (personal or dictated by the market) and the perception of the audience (visual language and cultural equipment to decipher meanings)	Intention Perception
Period Eye	Wider consideration in the artistic production, including power relationships linked to particular historical conditions, and the artistic and pictorial languages available for the audience and the artists	Visual genealogy Power relationships Market/ <i>truc</i>

*de la Camera de S. Mta. Catt.co.*' The Pope has just read it and gazes inquisitively at the writer of the missive.

The pose of the sitter follows the convention in portraiture, given definitive form in Raphael's *Portrait of Julius II* and used thereafter by many artists. Here, Velázquez chose strong, symbolic colours to emphasize the importance of his sitter: red and white, with some touches of gold on the papal throne, thus compose the tonality of the picture. He expanded this simple combination into infinite tones and textures, from the shiny crimson of the *manteletta* to the grave maroon of the cap, thence the impressionist brushstrokes of the creamy *rochetta* (Brown 1986). This notwithstanding, the figure is not adorned by these devices; on the contrary, the Pope appears more human in virtue of the emphasis given by the artist on his human body. Another important element concerns the technical devices available to the painter. The techniques used in Velázquez's portrait derive from his apprenticeship and artisan practice, including drawing skills, rapid sketches and, as previously mentioned, the classical conventions in the art of portraiture established by Raphael.

It is important to note that, in categorizing the 'frame', one must include most of the elements of the composition, the technique and the descriptive aspects of the image. In contemporary portraits favouring photography, Rose (2007: 13) recommends including three modalities that can contribute to a critical understanding of images: technological, compositional and social. For instance, the use of technology dictates the way in which images can be manipulated. A good example is Cecil Beaton's portraits of the young Queen Elizabeth, who took some kilos off her plump figure, while emphasizing the colour of her eyes and luscious lips appropriate of a fairy princess.

*Constructing visual meaning:* The intention of the portrait was to flatter the Pope's attributes, since Velázquez indeed was part of a diplomatic mission. The Pope's portrait shared a common language of symbols and imagery with the portraits of King Philip IV also executed by Velázquez. These portraits present an image of the leadership that is carefully crafted, serving specific purposes.

As a painter in a Catholic-centred world, Velázquez was aware of the conventions and symbols attached to each of the icons or saints, by highlighting their virtues or their martyrdom, including certain symbols (flowers, animals, books, utensils or props) that were easily understood by a mostly illiterate audience. As argued by Baxandall: 'the public mind was not a blank tablet on which the painters' representations of a story or a person could impress themselves; it was an active institution of interior visualization with which every painter had to get along' (1988: 43).

In particular, the seventeenth century marks a period of transition from a 'God-centred' world towards a more 'humanistic' centrality, propelled by the Renaissance ideology in Europe – an early milestone towards modernity. In the Velázquez representation of the Pope, the virtues of the good pontiff are highlighted in the painting: the bodily humanity of the person is central and exerts its powerful influence through the exchange of glances contextualized within a series of conventions and pre-understandings. It is possible that Velázquez was influenced by the precepts formulated by Erasmus de Rotterdam concerning 'the good prince', thus the leader is (or should be) a human being invested with very special characteristics (Feros 2002). Curiously, the painter's skill was such that he actually captured the real character of the sitter: it is said that, when the Pope saw the finished portrait, he said that it was *tropo vero*, too truthful! (Manchip-White 1969).

For contemporary portraits, it is important to consider the relationship between sitters and artists. Guthey and Jackson (2005) question the 'authenticity' of CEO images, as portraits are commissioned and executed by publicity agencies or renowned photographers. They focus on

the work of Per Morten Abrahamsen, a celebrated photographer and his work with CEOs and business leaders. For Guthey and Jackson: 'CEO portraits taken by recognised photographer/artists seek to associate both the executive and the corporation with this ideal artistic self and with his or her own cache of individual personality, authentic human presence and creative agency' (2005: 1068–1069).

Although not all CEO portraits are taken by such renowned artists, it is important to consider the process of negotiation and commission, between the sitter and the artist. It will be important to consider who takes part in the negotiations, what are the elements of the composition that are highlighted: the pose, the props, the intention; as well as the media and audience targeted by the portrait. Like traditional portraiture, the images convey a particular message to be deciphered or read by contemporary audiences. For instance, images of USA President Barack Obama as a pop-icon following conventions of advertising or Andy Warhol silk-screens are easily understood by certain audiences, and the intention is to create a certain impression in the public.

*The period eye:* Baxandall defines 'period eye' as the system of exchanges and understandings that facilitate the conveyance of a message. During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the art of portraiture focused on the representation of rulers. Powerful leaders adopted certain poses and devices, intended to convey their authority and status (West 2004). The political requests linked to the art of portraiture and the personal demands of Philip IV and Innocent X can be seen as part of the bargain made by Velázquez. Further, as argued by Brown, Velázquez himself pursued a deeply personal ambition: to become a gentleman, a knight of one of the exclusive brotherhoods endorsed by the Catholic Church. In this endeavour, the journey to Rome and the support of the influential pontiff formed an invaluable opportunity for the painter.

In terms of a visual genealogy, it is important to acknowledge the configuration of power and knowledge, or in this case power and representation, and how the visual repertoire available for artists was conditioned by overarching powers linked to religion or tradition. As we mentioned before, Innocent X as Head of the Catholic Church was aware of the power of images. In the counter-strategy against the growing competition from the Protestants in the North of Europe, the Catholic Church had favoured images, visuality and icons. Consequently, Velázquez's painting was ruled by the institutional conventions, the traditions of religious portraiture and the intentions of portraiture in depicting status, authority and hierarchy. Although our contemporary perception considers artists as innovators or tradition breakers, at the time of Velázquez, painters were not more than artisans at the service of their masters. In considering this painting, the period eye is determined by three main factors: first, the regulated conventions of portraiture at this particular historical moment regulated by Catholic perceptions on art and painting. Second, there is an emerging paradigm in the understanding of leadership: from a leader invested by divine design, the new leader is a human being, thus his attributes are focused on his human body rather than on symbols of divinity. And, third, the *truc* or exchange is dictated not in terms of money but favours and alliances, since the portrait is part of the diplomatic mission in which the artist is a key player.

Similar elements need to be considered when analysing modern portraits: what are the conventions in portraiture of contemporary leaders? For instance, communication experts and marketers decide whether or not to produce pictures of politicians as caring 'family men' or as 'working-class fellows' depending on the intention, the audience and the market. In addition, visual languages vary depending on the media: social networks, newspapers or television appearances. In all of these decisions, we must not forget that there is a clear intentionality and power relationships selecting and discerning what exactly is available for the 'eye' to see and the mind to understand about leadership.

## Synthesis and conclusions

This chapter shows how the manipulation of images as a way of constructing charismatic leadership is nothing new, yet their power in conveying status and power are still pervasive. Art history allows us to understand the context and power configurations through which certain representations of power and status are possible. In spite of the changes in visual language, available techniques and mediums of expressions, the depiction of leadership as an individual of charismatic features persists. This view is engraved and reproduced in current images of leaders, top managers and CEOs as instrumental heroes of the capitalistic system.

As mentioned before, portraits – throughout history – seem to emphasize the idea of charismatic leadership as an individual trait, invested in certain individuals – great men or women who can lead corporations, governments or communities to certain aims. However, this view neglects the fact that leaders are working within organizations and teams, and that their actions are part of a wider political and cultural environment. As argued by Grint (2007: 232) this individualistic approach dismisses the possibility of learning to lead as a ‘social process’ rather than an individual event. Portraits deploy a variety of conventions and exchanges that contribute to the routinization of charisma as an individual trait.

It is thus important to have appropriate tools to reveal the sometimes hidden meanings of portraits in their conveyance of leadership. In the example, the portrait of Innocent X by Velázquez deploys ecclesiastic and symbolic conventions through the use of the figure, the pose and the pictorial composition. Innocent X, as the Head of the Catholic Church, is depicted as an efficient and rational leader, which in contemporary terms resembles the characteristics of a successful CEO. However, his authority and leadership are limited by the boundaries of the organizational space they represent. The organization or the context is suggested yet the focus remains on the individual. As noted above, the situation of the sitter is dictated by wider conventions regarding the ‘virtues’ of the leader, shifting from a traditional (religious) leadership towards a charismatic type of leadership as underlined by the emphasis on the human body.

Second, this chapter alerts us to the intentionality and symbolic elements of portraits relevant to the understanding of contemporary leadership. As argued by Fisher and Fowler, the re-imagination of business leaders as ‘heroes’ clearly uses the symbols and significance of ‘graphic or visual images and their roles in contemporary culture as a starting point for normative reflection on leadership in general, and business leadership in particular’ (1995: 30). We must not forget that any image (as worthy of a thousand words) is charged with meanings and intentions. Misquoting (playfully) Baxandall’s (1986) explanation about the influence of the Catholic Church in the regulation of images and paintings actually may reveal the business world’s intentionality of using images in the reconfiguration of the identities of their leaders:

Know that there were three reasons for the institution of images [in the mass media/advertising]. First, for the instruction of simple people ... Second, so that the mystery of [capital/capitalism] and the examples of the [CEOs] may be the more active in our memory through being presented daily to our eyes. Third, to excite feelings of devotion [consumption], these being aroused more effectively by things seen than by things heard.

(*cf.* p. 41)

Third, this chapter offers a practical framework based on Baxandall’s (1986) approach to art history and updated by Guthey and Jackson (2008). This framework is not exhaustive but it offers a comprehensive approach to the analysis of images, in particular, those in portraits. Moreover, in the context of contemporary discussions on visibility and leadership, this chapter invites

the exploration of aesthetic expressions as a means of enquiry into organizational and social issues, such as the case of leadership. It stresses the potentialities of considering certain forms of artistic expressions, such as portraiture, as heuristic devices towards reaching an understanding of some of the processes through which leadership is socially constructed and the mechanisms that promote one or other idea of leadership in different historical periods.

The exploration of aesthetic products as a means of enquiring provides an interesting avenue for scholars of organization and leadership. In a world overpopulated with images of economic depression, financial crises and political scandals, we should question to what extent the focus on the figure of the leaders disregards crucial elements in the equation, such as the context, the organizational setting, the socio-political environment and the power relationships. In this chapter, the power of art is emphasized in the artists' quest to stimulate these types of questions on how we see leadership both as visual images and also as themes for further study and understanding.

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