



'No More Heroes': Critical Perspectives on Leadership Romanticism

Organization Studies
1–23

© The Author(s) 2017

Reprints and permissions:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/0170840617727784

www.egosnet.org/os



David Collinson

Lancaster University, UK

Owain Smolović Jones

The Open University, UK

Keith Grint

Warwick University, UK

Abstract

This paper revisits Meindl et al's (1985) 'romance of leadership' thesis and extends these ideas in a number of inter-related ways. First, it argues that the thesis has sometimes been neglected and/or misinterpreted in subsequent studies. Second, the paper suggests that romanticism is a much broader and more historically rich term with wider implications for leadership studies than originally proposed. Arguing that romanticism stretches beyond leader attribution, we connect leadership theory to a more enduring and naturalistic tradition of romantic thought that has survived and evolved since the mid-18th century. Third, the paper demonstrates the contemporary relevance of the romanticism critique. It reveals how the study of leadership continues to be characterized by romanticizing tendencies in many of its most influential theories, illustrating this argument with reference to spiritual and authentic leadership theories, which only recognize positive engagement with leaders. Equally, the paper suggests that romanticism can shape conceptions not only of leaders, but also of followers, their agency and their (potential for) resistance. We conclude by discussing future possible research directions for the romanticism critique that extend well beyond its original focus on leader attribution to inform a broader critical approach to leadership studies.

Keywords

critical leadership studies, expressive collectives, leader attribution, leadership romanticism, natural leaders, romanticizing followership

Corresponding author:

David Collinson, Leadership & Management, Lancaster University, Lancaster, LA1 4YW, UK.

Email: d.collinson@lancaster.ac.uk

Introduction

It is now over 30 years since Meindl, Ehrlich and Dukerich (1985) published their classic article critically examining the widespread tendency for leadership scholars, practitioners, the media and societies as a whole to attribute undue influence and responsibility to leaders for organizational successes and failures. Meindl et al.'s critique helped to facilitate the emergence of important new post-heroic ideas about distributed, shared and situated leadership and followership. In recent years, however, important insights from this critique have either been forgotten or have tended to be misinterpreted in ways that dilute or neutralize Meindl et al.'s critical insights. Partly prompted by this misunderstanding, our paper revisits the romanticism thesis to re-state its continued relevance for leadership studies. It also seeks to build on and extend Meindl et al.'s original ideas in a number of ways.

First, we re-examine the leadership romanticism thesis and question the way it has sometimes been interpreted in contemporary accounts. Second, the paper examines the aesthetic and historical dimensions of romanticism and considers their wider implications for leadership studies. The paper connects leadership theory to a more enduring and naturalistic tradition of romantic thought that has survived and evolved since the mid-18th century. Meindl's notion of the romance of leadership is largely restricted to leader attribution and does not explore romanticism as a concept or discourse with its own history. By revisiting the concept, we seek to show how romanticism can be approached as a mode of thinking that is ubiquitous and holds relevance beyond leader attribution. Third and relatedly, the paper is concerned to demonstrate the contemporary significance of the romanticism critique of leadership research and practice. It demonstrates how various currently influential leadership theories, both leader-centred and post-heroic, continue to romanticize leaders. We also suggest that romanticism can shape conceptions not only of leaders, but also of followers and their practices.

The paper highlights the usefulness of applying a historically situated critical aesthetic analysis to contemporary organizational concepts. Doing so, we suggest, can enhance understanding of the genesis and persistence of certain discourses. More specifically, we seek to identify and foreground the notion of romanticized discourse as influential in our organizational times. The paper makes the case that romanticizing leadership is informed by certain key characteristics that can be traced back to dimensions of romantic thought and philosophy. Romanticizing leadership naturalizes the privileged status of leaders, portraying them as possessing the imaginative and heroic capabilities to access transcendent natural truths.

Romanticism is not restricted to accounts of individual leaders, however, but also stretches to collective constructions of both leadership and followership. We theorize such 'post-heroic' constructions as 'expressive collectives', accounts of leadership and followership that emphasize 'collective individuality' (Murphy & Roberts, 2004, p. 45), a perspective that offers primacy to freedom of self-expression. It is also a discourse in which concerns relating to power tend to disappear from view, replaced by a focus on the language of 'natural' harmony and conciliation. In re-examining leadership romanticism, we draw on Benjamin's (1996) critique of romantic thought, which he claimed risked overlooking the role of criticism in identifying and amplifying points of rupture and negativity in works of art. Informed by Benjamin's arguments and our own analysis of contemporary theories and practices, we conclude the paper by discussing future possible directions for more critical, de-romanticized approaches to leadership theory and practice.

The Romance of Leadership

The concept of leadership romanticism has its origins in the 1985 paper by Meindl, Ehrlich and Dukerich. Drawing on detailed empirical analysis, the authors highlight 'the prominence of the

concept of leadership in our collective consciousness' (1985, p. 78). Examining the attribution of performance outcomes to leaders' abilities, they question the widespread tendency in both academic research and popular thinking to exaggerate leaders' contributions and to treat leadership as a causal and explanatory category. Meindl et al. refer to this tendency as 'the romance of leadership'. They contend that such accounts tend either to excessively credit leaders for high organizational performance or, conversely, to hold them overly responsible for workplace failures.

Meindl et al. suggest that in complex contexts of indeterminate and unpredictable events, 'the romance of leadership' provides a reassuring but overly simplified way to understand multifaceted organizational and economic processes, and to construct causal connections. They argue that in practice individual leaders' contributions to a collective enterprise are likely to be much more constrained and closely tied to external factors outside a leader's control. Echoing Smircich and Morgan's (1982) argument, Meindl et al. contend that leadership should be understood as intimately entangled in organizational symbolism and, by extension, wider social symbolism. The manipulation of language and other organizationally significant symbols allows leaders to manage the political and social processes that maintain organized activity, generating a sense of 'efficacy and control', and thereby emphasizing that leaders 'do make a difference' (p. 97). In this sense-making process, leadership has assumed a status of 'mystery and near mysticism' (p. 78).

It may be that this mysterious and elusive status makes leadership particularly amenable to the kind of romanticized causal attributions problematized by Meindl et al. It is certainly the case that leadership scholars have often conceptualized leadership as 'something' that escapes and goes beyond the regular boundaries of rational organizational reasoning. Leadership has been approached as offering an appeal over and above the more mundane but also, perhaps, the more accountable concept of management (O'Reilly & Reed, 2011). Leadership appears to stretch beyond the boundaries of rational and directly knowable language, scattering a mysticism that includes, but also exceeds, individual leaders. Perhaps it is this vagueness and ambiguity, combined with aggrandizing language, which provides important clues as to its 'romantic' appeal, an appeal which has led to a collectively 'enamoured' population of scholars, policymakers, developers and practitioners (Ford & Harding, 2007, p. 476).

Presenting a damning critique of many mainstream studies, Meindl et al.'s romance of leadership thesis has been highly influential and widely cited (see, for example, Bligh & Schyns, 2007; Shamir, Pillai, Bligh, & Uhl-Bien, 2007). It has also been instrumental in the emergence of post-heroic theories that emphasize the social, situational, relational and collective nature of leadership dynamics. Post-heroic perspectives focus on distributed (Gronn, 2002), shared (Pearce & Conger, 2003), servant (Hale & Fields, 2007), quiet (Collins, 2001), collaborative (Archer & Cameron, 2008) as well as community leadership (Ricketts & Ladewig, 2008) and co-leadership (Alvarez & Svejnova, 2005). They also ascribe greater importance to both context (Fairhurst, 2009; Jepson, 2009) and followership (Bligh, 2011; Chaleff, 2015; Kellerman, 2007; Riggio & Reichard, 2008; Uhl-Bien, Riggio, Lowe, & Carsten, 2014). Yet, despite its influence on leadership studies, the critical and questioning edge of the romance of leadership thesis has often been neglected or downplayed in subsequent research. Many leadership perspectives that have emerged since 1985 have largely ignored Meindl et al.'s central critique, reproducing romanticized assumptions that fixate on leaders – or collectives – in heroic terms.

In recent times, the critical dimension of leadership romanticism has tended to be diluted. Indeed, vigorous critiques of leadership and management writing generally are few and far between (cf. Rosenzweig, 2014, whose demolition of many sacred managerial cows is exemplary). Within leadership studies, Kempster and Carroll (2016) seek to reframe romanticism and leadership in more ethical terms, advocating 'a new romanticism' (p. 8) which they refer to as 'the romance of responsible leadership'. Here, romanticism is acknowledged, but is re-interpreted in less critical

ways. Drawing on the imagery of the Romantic poets, the editors re-define romanticism as a focus on ‘hope’ (p. 2) and ‘imagination’ (p. 9), and as ‘the free and imaginative expression of the feelings of the artist’ (Kempster & Carroll, 2016, p. 9). In place of Meindl et al.’s *critique*, the authors *value* romanticism and refer to themselves as ‘*the new romantics of responsible leadership*’ (Kempster & Carroll, 2016, p. 9).

What is surprising about the contributions in this edited collection is their lack of engagement with Meindl et al.’s (1985) original thesis and its critical implications. Of the 11 chapters, only two cite Meindl et al.’s seminal article (Blakeley, 2016; Lee & Higgs, 2016). Two others (Kempster & Carroll, 2016; Parry & Jackson, 2016) cite Meindl’s (1995) chapter published ten years later, which adopts a more explicitly follower-centred perspective.¹ The introductory chapter defines leadership romanticism as ‘the follower tendency to attribute responsibility for company performance to organizational leaders’, a thesis the editors assert was ‘developed by Meindl (1995)’. There is no mention of the classic Meindl et al. paper published ten years earlier. Concerned to ‘embrace’ romanticism as a positive discourse, rather than use the thesis, as Meindl et al. (1985) did, to advance critique of contemporary leadership theories and practices, the editors seek to:

reintroduce the romanticised rhetoric to situate it within current leadership discourses regarding authentic, distributed, and ethical leadership where the societal, economic, and environmental challenges do require us to collectively take the lead in moving forward towards doing good and growing well. (Kempster & Carroll, 2016, p. 3)

This rather uncritical statement takes for granted that concepts such as ‘ethical leadership’, ‘doing good’ and ‘growing well’ are self-evident and have universally accepted meanings. More critical approaches recognize that these are essentially contested terms that can be defined in multiple ways according to various political agendas. The editors’ intention to ‘reintroduce’ and ‘embrace’ romanticism significantly redefines the term’s meaning, limiting its original critical intent. In effect, their argument tends to romanticize leadership romanticism.

Rather than ‘romanticize romanticism’, we seek to build on and extend Meindl et al.’s more questioning insights. For them, the romance of leadership thesis is not concerned with promoting hope or imagination. Rather, it questions the widespread tendency to attribute excessive and causal power and influence to leaders. We see the romance of leadership thesis as an important precursor and starting point for the critical analysis of leadership theory and practice. In seeking to develop our argument that romanticism stretches beyond leader attribution, the paper begins by connecting leadership theory to a more enduring and naturalistic tradition of romantic thought that has survived and evolved since the mid-18th century.

The Old Romantics and their Problematic Legacy

Romanticism is typically understood as an artistic, intellectual, literary and even social-political movement that sought to recapture a sense of proportion with regard to humanity’s relationship to nature (Ferber, 2010). Applied retrospectively to a collection of late 18th-century writers, poets, artists and musicians, romanticism originally developed as a reaction to the Enlightenment. Indeed, it is impossible to understand romanticism (late 18thC to middle 19thC) without first understanding the context from which it arose, namely the modernizing impulses of the Enlightenment that prioritized rationality, logic, production, objectivity and control (early 17thC to late 18thC).

By the late 18th century, although great strides had been made in understanding the world and human beings’ place within it, these breakthroughs had come at the expense of a sense of alienation, a feeling that ‘avidly rationalist philosophy ignored the sensuous qualities of particular things,

while a short-sighted empiricism was unable to peer beyond particular bits and pieces of the world to any total picture which they might compose' (Eagleton, 1983, pp. 21–2). Reacting against industrialization and the factory system, romanticism emphasized that which was being lost: human subjectivity, emotions and imagination, human embeddedness in nature and the romantic idyll of rural communities. In this sense romanticism was utopian, fundamentally shaped by idealism, nostalgia and a sense of loss (Lowy & Sayre, 2001).

The Romantic movement was never united in its cultural reaction to the Enlightenment. Indeed, the Enlightenment itself was built upon difference. Certainly the Enlightenment had a French timbre – as exemplified by the *Encyclopédie* of Denis Diderot and Jean le Rond d'Alembert published between 1751 and 1772. It embodied common assumptions about abandoning traditional forms of authority (especially political and religious authority) and seeking out possibilities for applying the logic and scientific rationality of the Age of Reason to address humanity's problems and create a universally better society (Fitzpatrick, 1999), or to liberate the mind from wanton ignorance (Porter, 2001): at least until the French Revolution.

The romantic rebuttal to the Enlightenment was rooted in the assumption that human intuition and emotion were better arbiters of civilization than science, especially the French version that had 'inevitably' led to revolution, when Britain's political stability allegedly demonstrated the superiority of evolution and accommodation. However, the meaning attributed by the Romantics to the idea of romanticism was more diverse and contested than the interpretation of 'romance' utilized by Meindl et al. While the latter were critical of the excessive attribution of power and influence to leaders, the elevating tendency of individuals was but one aspect of the richer fabric of thought of the Romantics. In relation to leadership studies we suggest that much value can be gained by extending the conception of romanticism beyond leader attribution and by approaching romanticism as a concept and movement with a more generally salient legacy.

Benjamin's Critique of Romantic Criticism

In approaching romanticism as a problematic concept, as a movement with particular historical and aesthetic roots, and as a means of stretching the thesis of Meindl et al., we are influenced by Walter Benjamin's (1996) interpretation of Romantic criticism. Benjamin was, on the one hand, appreciative of Romantic theories of criticism, which he connected to a particular approach to reflection, where critique helps unfold the possibilities of a work of art, drawing attention to the work's internal possibilities. For Benjamin, this was to be welcomed, as such a focus on the immanence of art injected a much-needed challenge to (crude) Enlightenment adherence to the known and knowable. He was alert, on the other hand, to the possibility of Romantic criticism perpetuating the construction of an uncritical and unitarist interpretation of art, a point we hold as significant for certain predominant approaches to leadership studies that tend to valorize leaders and processes of leadership, offering them a position beyond the realms of criticism.

The Romantics, in Benjamin's view, conceived of an 'absolute' (1996, p. 144) in nature that was accessible via art and its criticism. For Benjamin, the romantic account of criticism was interpreted as problematic because it asked that 'every critical understanding of an artistic entity [should be interpreted] as reflection in the entity, nothing other than a higher, self-actively originated degree of this entity's consciousness' and that 'such intensification of consciousness is in principle infinite' (Benjamin, 1996, p. 152). Observers and critics are asked by romanticism to appreciate art in and of itself, with the work of art offering an increasing sense of 'intensification' as the spectator becomes more attuned to some higher connection to its truth, accessible directly through the work of art. The critic is thus 'transformed into that infinitude' (p. 152) of nature that the artist seeks to convey.

Benjamin argued that such an approach was problematic because it informed a logic of criticism that did not countenance points of rupture. Thus, just as Marx argued that commodities were fetishized in capitalism and operated to mystify the world of exploitation (and generated alienation – a romantic term in itself) so romanticized art, for Benjamin, replaced a disharmonious social reality with a harmonious collective myth (Jeffries, 2016, p. 178). Criticism and art become locked into an internal relationship of ever greater appreciation of an absolute, rather than of critique. From the perspective of romanticized criticism, any object that can be deemed an object of appreciative and immanent criticism is also regarded as art, and anything that cannot, is simply pushed aside as not art. Good criticism, for Benjamin, involves a ‘moment of self-annihilation, the possible negation in reflection’ (p. 152). This means that the critic is able to negate both the self and the work of art, to highlight points of ‘rupture’ (p. 347) in the form of the work of art: points that do not seem to fit or that undermine its wholeness, and therefore undermine our own sense of wholeness.

Our argument about leadership romanticism echoes that of Benjamin’s critique and runs through the central themes of this paper: romanticized leadership invites only positive engagement from readers, scholars and practitioners from within the particular concept of leadership offered. It asks that one consumes and relates to leadership in a way that assumes a positive and natural absolute: the status to be attained is simply leadership, rather than there being such a thing as good and bad leadership practice. Romanticized leadership posits a representation of universal truth within the particularities of its symbolic manifestations, the various positive theories of leadership. Romanticized accounts of leadership naturalize power asymmetries and solidify the identities of individual leaders as privileged actors, asking that critique is substituted with expressive contributions to the absolute.

We can see something of these romanticized dynamics in the rise of Donald Trump: during the United States presidential election campaigns of 2016, Democratic Party attempts to highlight the irrationality of Trump’s pronouncements, or his predilection for casting ‘the other’ (in its various embodiments – journalists, women, gays, Mexicans, Muslims etc.), proved irrelevant to his popularity; indeed, the wilder his statements, the greater his popularity. Here, writ large, is the ‘bearer of truth’, the leader destined to save the USA from itself. We do not have to be avid readers of Plato, de Tocqueville, Burke or even Weber to recognize the dangers of the mob: this is the other side of the same romantic assumption about the ‘wisdom of crowds’ (Surowiecki, 2005; cf. Tammet, 2009) and about collaborative leadership (Kagan, 2016).

Informed by Benjamin’s critique, but seeking to go beyond it, we now extend Meindl et al.’s thesis by exploring three further ways in which romanticism can characterize contemporary leadership theories, namely that: (1) leaders are a ‘natural’ phenomenon (and therefore beyond criticism), rather than being socially constructed; (2) one consequence of this is that leadership, in its purest form, is manifest in ‘expressive harmonious collectives’ – unitary groups that are regularly required to regurgitate the ‘faith’; and (3), another consequence is a perspective that, ironically, tends to romanticize followers too, so the ambiguity of ‘followership’ is permanently displaced into the ‘wisdom of the crowd’.

‘Natural’ Leaders

We begin by outlining how romanticized assumptions of a ‘natural’ leader often inform many influential contemporary theories. These assumptions, we suggest, can be traced back to romanticism’s preoccupation with rediscovering a primal natural world and with elevating the creative human imagination to a position from which it was thought possible to access nature’s mystical but ultimately unknowable secrets. Furthermore, we argue that interpreting contemporary critiques of

individualist leadership theory through a critical analysis of Romanticism can deepen understanding of the genesis and rootedness of such discourses of leadership: specifically, that they privilege and mystify the individual imagination and ‘natural’ context for leadership without allowing a basis for their critique. Romanticism asks us to accept and judge leadership without rupture.

Romanticism: Privileging nature and the human imagination

Romanticism rejected what it saw as the Enlightenment’s scientific pretensions of explaining, and thus controlling nature. It did so by projecting a conceptualization of nature as something greater than the human potential to capture and fully understand it because the whole was greater than the sum of the parts. Romantics viewed nature as ‘the primary fact and force, and that human consciousness is nature’s product, not its creator’ (Ferber, 2010, p. 57). Inherent in such thinking is the notion that the Enlightenment had crossed an important line of hubris, and had assumed that the human being could know, dominate or rationalize away nature. Such a cornerstone of romantic thinking has often led to the misconception that the Romantics were somehow opposed to science. On the contrary, they were fascinated by science, viewing the latest discoveries as windows into the secrets of nature (Holmes, 2009). Nature was not to be controlled or rationalized away but glimpsed at via the arts, politics or science.

Bridging nature and the human being, for the Romantics, was the notion of an idealized human imagination: this was ‘Romanticism’s answer to the analytic powers of reason’ (Murphy & Roberts, 2004, p. 4). Viewed historically, one can interpret romantic investment in the power of the imagination as ‘an image of non-alienated creation’ (Eagleton, 1983, p. 19). Investment in the imagination was a way for people of the time to free themselves from the increasingly impersonal structures of organizational and social life arising from the Enlightenment. Human beings were viewed as created from and attached to the most meaningful force of them all, nature, and it was only via artistic practices of the human imagination that such a connection was possible (Berlin, 1965/2000, p. 98). The Romantics inserted into public discourse the notion that motives and ideals, discovered and explored via imaginative activity and struggle, were more important than measurable outcomes (Blanning, 2010).

Carlyle – the author of the Great Man theory of leadership – was especially enamoured of the German reaction to the French Enlightenment. He corresponded with Goethe – the archetypal Romantic novelist – and also translated into English the work of individuals such as Richeter. Indeed, Carlyle’s (1841/1993) assaults even upon the acceptable face of the Enlightenment – utilitarianism – perfectly capture his antipathy for the ‘mechanical mind’ and his preference for the ‘dynamic’ nature of heroes, who alone, he argued, turn the wheel of history. Such a stance was well aligned with a ‘Romantic [notion of] nature viewed aesthetically, and romantic art [as] the product of nature in the subject (the genius)’ (Murphy & Roberts, 2004, p. 20). Yet it was this very synecdoche (imagination standing in as a part of nature) that was troubling for Benjamin, with such a posited relationship holding the potential for a diminution of the power of critique.

Romanticized leaders: Transcendent nature in the subject

This notion of a transcendent ‘nature in the subject’, we argue, continues to permeate much of the contemporary leadership literature, resulting in the routine diminution of critique, whereby leaders are held as beyond the realms of criticism by virtue of attaining leader status. Little space is provided for considering the tensions and ruptures in such theorizing of leadership in the influential perspectives we examine, although we also recognize the important contribution of some scholars to exposing the ‘dark side’ of populist and academic infatuation with leadership (e.g. Gabriel,

2012; Tourish, 2013; Vince & Mazen, 2014). To illustrate our position, we draw in particular on spiritual leadership (SL) as an exemplar of current romanticized theorizing, while also suggesting that similar romanticized perspectives frequently characterize other contemporary theories such as transformational, authentic and servant leadership.

In recent years studies of SL have become increasingly common. Spirituality in relation to the organization is defined by Weinberg and Locander (2014, p. 391) as 'a psychological characteristic encompassing meaningful life, wholeness, and interconnectedness with others'. SL is a theory, then, with grand, even total ambition and is a good example, in Benjamin's terms, of the 'intensification' of imaginative appreciation without the rupture of critique, promising meaning above and beyond seemingly restrictive and rational organizational language. Indeed, Whittington, Pitts, Kageler and Goodwin (2005, pp 755–7) claim that spiritual leaders ought to offer a 'pure motive' for their actions and decisions, in addition to 'influence without asserting authority'. This claim ascribes a status for leadership beyond the mundanity of everyday concerns of organizational power, instrumentalism and transactionalism – and a position (of purity) beyond critique. Transcendence is indeed a common theme within SL, with, for example, Weinberg and Locander (2014, p. 391) discussing 'meaning and purpose through the transcendental experience of work'.

From a more critical perspective, Tourish and Tourish (2010, p. 218) argue that SL promotes a view of leadership as embodied in a leader, a view of 'subjectivity which enables powerful elites to promote sectional interests while claiming that they embody universal truths and principles'. Tourish (2013) notes the tendency of SL studies to promote the intrusion and colonization of people's private lives via mystical language that claims a privileged status. He also argues that SL offers an exalted status to the individual leader figure, who is said to hold the 'ability to "enable" the worker's inner life, sense of meaningful work, and community' (Tourish, 2013, p. 66). This in turn, Tourish argues, promotes a unitarist notion of purpose and work.

We seek to take this critique a step further by advancing the proposition that SL, in common with other theories of leadership that exalt the individual leader and promote a unitarist view of organization, can be more richly understood as a concept with deep romanticizing tendencies. These tendencies stretch beyond leader attribution and into commitments that idealize organizational and social relations, claiming a position for itself beyond critique. Most obviously, SL and similar leadership theories such as authentic and servant leadership, separate themselves from the purely religious and are instead expressed in largely non-theistic, albeit mystical terms. This is a commitment to a natural realm unknowable through conventional science, philosophy or theory development. Such a romanticized commitment, we hold, manifests in three dominant ways.

First, SL is concerned with a meaning that 'calls' leaders and followers to a greater purpose (Fry, Vitucci, & Cedillo, 2005). This 'sense of calling' (Fry, 2003, p. 711) is a dominant signifier in SL, imprecisely defined other than as something that speaks to subjects from beyond, much in the same way as the Romantics hailed nature as the immanent force that invited artists to free themselves from the shackles of Enlightenment science. Transcendence appears as vital to the discourse, suggesting a purpose above and beyond enjoying one's job. Just as the Romantic painters and writers believed that anyone was able to tap into the transcendent powers of nature via an unleashing of the human imagination, access to the powers of spirituality are deemed open for anyone in organizational life – leaders and followers. Guidance is required, however, for the aspiring spiritual leader and follower: hence a recent emphasis on the importance of 'close and personal' mentoring in the cultivation of workplace spirituality, with a leader figure deemed important to guide followers, providing 'the requisite identity-building support necessary to nurture and sustain individual spirituality over time' (Weinberg & Locander, 2014, p. 392; cf. Brinkmann, 2017).

A second manifestation of romanticized thinking in SL is its proclamations of faith. If one is to step beyond the rational confines of organizational systems, it appears that an additional investment

needs to be made in a *faith* that cancels out more managerial notions of accountability or scientific burdens of evidence. Faith, and by extension SL, is posited as something that does not require validation in an external referent (science, the political, or even aesthetic criticism): 'Faith is exactly the thing that renders [its] strict proof unnecessary' (Mitroff & Denton, 1999, p. 89). SL writers particularly introduce faith in relation to an organization or leader's vision and the motivation of followers to abide by such a vision. An exemplar of such thinking, Fry (2003) and Fry et al. (2005) instrumentalize faith as that supplement which ties workers in an irrational sense to their work and, crucially, improves productivity, driving them to 'do what it takes' in the service of SL:

Doing what it takes through faith in a clear, compelling vision produces a sense of calling—that part of spiritual survival that gives one a sense of making a difference and therefore that one's life has meaning. Vision, hope/faith adds belief, conviction, trust, and action for performance of the work to achieve the vision...People who have hope/faith in the organization's vision and who experience calling and membership will do what it takes in pursuit of the vision to continuously improve and be more productive. (Fry et al., 2005, p. 839)

One might interpret such passages as a somewhat knowing and even cynical act of romanticizing: the content; the 'meaning' of the spiritual object is less significant than its form, its 'sense', and the role that form plays in acquiring outcomes of hard work towards meeting organizational objectives.

Third, and most importantly, SL offers a closed, self-referential system, akin to the totalistic and autonomous conception of nature within romanticism. We are informed that a 'growing chorus of scholarly voices is arguing that spirituality is necessary in organizations' (Benefiel, 2005, p. 724), implying an inevitable momentum for SL that is beyond the control of any individual or scientific logic: SL is *necessary*. Nowhere is such necessity more advanced in SL than in the notion of unitary, ideologically neutral and permanent values. Fry (2003, p. 712) posits 'patience, kindness, lack of envy, forgiveness, humility, selflessness, self-control, trust, loyalty, and truthfulness' as key values for the practice of SL. The author encapsulates these values in the form of 'altruistic love', which he defines as 'a sense of wholeness, harmony, and well-being produced through care, concern, and appreciation for both self and others' (Fry, 2003, p. 714); or, in the words of Chen, Yang and Li (2012, p. 893), 'complete, harmonious, and happy feelings through care and appreciation for self and others'. Altruistic love and the other values of SL are constructed as all-encompassing ('whole', 'complete'), external to power relations ('harmonious', 'happy') or even in fact beyond any specific philosophical, political or scientific anchor. One may speculate or interpret such values as belonging to Christianity, new-age spirituality (Swan, 2010) or capitalist ideology, but we are invited by the authors to view them as ahistorical and transcendent: as connected via the human imagination to a permanent, ultimately unknowable and autonomous nature. Such ideas and practices, in Benjamin's (1996) terms, are problematically positioned beyond critique, as the only qualification for 'good' SL is simply surrendering oneself to an intensification of the transcendent.

A sense of immanence and the closing down of the potential for critique through appeal to a universal and transcendent truth is a dominant feature of several other influential leadership theories. 'Servant leaders' are presented as possessing 'moral authority... They follow truth. They follow natural law. They follow principles. They follow a common, agreed-upon vision. They share values. They grow to trust one another. Moral authority is mutually developed and shared' (Greenleaf, 2002, p. 5). Ethics are hereby reduced to a timeless, yet mystical sense of purpose possessed by certain privileged leaders. Greenleaf thus subverts the 'common-sense understanding of the word [servant], as someone who works in a menial position keeping the home of someone else clean, tidy and well-functioning', instead positing a view of servant leaders as the 'superior, exalted

few from which those who serve (what is argued to be) the [vague] common good are drawn' (Ford & Harding, 2015, p. 17).

A similar sense of universality and immanent closure is offered in authentic leadership theory. Ethics seem central to the positioning of authentic leadership, yet what researchers in this area constitute as the ethical remains unspecified. Smolović Jones and Grint (2013) have argued that, in place of specific ethical postulations, one finds a series of vague affirmations that leaders ought to display a 'high' (Gardner, Fischer, & Hunt, 2009; Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008) or 'positive' (Walumbwa et al., 2008) standard of ethics. Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans and May (2004, p. 805), for example, refer to 'honesty' and 'integrity' as constituting the 'high' moral principles possessed by authentic leaders. Meanwhile, May, Chan, Hodges and Avolio (2003) offer 'courage' as an important value and behavioural trait. Again, such values are posited as immanent and universal, the suggestion being that they lie beyond the scope of philosophical or political critique.

This discussion has illustrated how romanticism is frequently reproduced in contemporary leadership studies through a focus on 'natural leaders' whose status cannot be criticized from within its positive, transcendental boundaries. But it is not only contemporary leader-centred leadership theories that reproduce romanticism. Currently influential post-heroic theories, often characterized by more collective approaches, can also succumb to similar romanticizing tendencies.

Expressive Harmonious Collectives

This section begins by exploring the romantic notion of expression and its location in harmonious collectives. We then apply these insights to contemporary accounts of collective leadership, arguing that such constructions seem to be underwritten by two romanticized commitments:

- Harmonious leadership over divisive power: a view of leadership that seeks to neutralize rupturing power in favour of collective work, portrayed as seeking harmonious dialogue and consensus.
- 'Expressive leadering': we posit expressive leadering as constituting a central commitment to self-expression within notions of collective leadership. Such expressive leadering, we argue, 'positivizes' leadership as object and practice to the extent that it excludes the possibility for critical engagement, and privileges immanent intensification (Benjamin, 1996). It can also act as a cosmetic concealment that draws on the alluring language of leadership to present the unwanted, the mundane and the unpleasant in emancipatory terms.

The tendency within both commitments, we argue, is to approach collective leadership as of value beyond critique.

Expressive collectivism in romanticism

One of the chief curiosities of the Romantics is that the commitment to accessing nature via the human imagination could be interpreted as a particularly individualistic pursuit and yet, perhaps more than most intellectual and artistic movements, the Romantics displayed an unusually strong affinity for comradeship and solidarity. There was a sense within romanticism of 'democratizing the creative spirit' (Ferber, 2010, p. 39). We explore this tendency to romanticize collectives as *expressive*. A romantic notion of expressive collectives is closely linked to the kind of intense 'collective individuality' (Murphy & Roberts, 2004, p. 45) that was a hallmark of artistic communities and the political philosophy of the era. Romantics tended to find common bonds of solidarity

around the notion of an 'intuitive feeling of kinship with the natural world' and the sense of shared commitment to allowing the human imagination free rein (Ferber, 2010, p. 55). This was no superficial, hedonistic comradeship, however, but a collective bond based on the commitment that artists would support other artists in attaining and pursuing their individual ideals (Hay, 2010).

The Romantics inserted into public discourse the notion that motives and ideals, discovered and explored via imaginative activity and struggle, were more important than outcomes (Riasanovsky, 1995). Crucial for the Romantics was idealism, of discovering a meaning greater than the human self, 'the necessity of fighting for your beliefs to the last breath of your body' (Berlin, 1965/2000, p. 8). This is the image savoured by the Romantics of the Antigone-like subject prepared to sacrifice all in the name of an ideal. As nature itself was ultimately approached by Romantics as incapable of final capture, so also the human ideal could only strive towards a satisfaction that could never be fulfilled, a 'view of human life as incessant striving towards an unattainable ideal' (Riasanovsky, 1995, p. 82).

For Murphy and Roberts (2004, p. 43), romanticism witnessed the birth of the 'expressive subject', a subject that evolved through to modernity and post-modernity. The Enlightenment contributed to the notion of a knowable and manipulable subject of science (Foucault, 1991). Romanticism preferred a conceptualization of the subject 'not defined in terms of rational control but in terms of the capacity for self-articulation. This places a premium on individuation, authenticity and originality, in the double sense of reconnection with the living source and uniqueness' (Murphy & Roberts, 2004, p. 44). One sees in romanticism early traces of the self-development and therapeutic cultures movements (Cederström & Spicer, 2015; Smolović Jones, Grint, & Cammock, 2015; Swan, 2010). Such an emphasis places value on individual wellbeing, on finding physical and emotional health through both private and professional work, blurring the distinctions between workplace, private realm and indeed an ultimately unknowable but ubiquitous 'nature'.

Collectivism, then, can be individualized via recourse to a natural and universal harmony and synchronicity, only accessible via free self-expression. It is this notion of expressive collectivism, we argue, that is particularly prominent as a discourse within collective accounts of leadership but is deemed problematic as its romanticizing tendencies tend to close down avenues for critique in favour of intense expressions of harmony (Benjamin, 1996). Barker (2002, p. 87), for example, highlights the limitations of what he refers to as 'the industrial paradigm of leadership' (i.e. Enlightenment-informed trait or behavioural theories). Barker's critique is rooted in a view of social goals as inherently complex (see also Grint, 2005; Heifetz, 1994). For Barker, conventional approaches to leadership work when the goals are more clear-cut: increased profit, market share, return on investment etc. If the goal is more contested or amorphous, concerned, for example, with social development, education, freedom or some other end value, success is no longer as straightforward to capture. Knowing and measuring is here framed as 'industrial', whereas a collective sense of leadership is viewed as less certain. If collective leadership is beyond the 'industrial', then perhaps it should be interpreted as closer to a more natural, expressive sense of the human and collective humanity?

'Harmonious leadership' over 'divisive power'

This section argues that a key dimension of the romanticizing of collective leadership is the prioritization of consensus and harmony over power and conflict. More specifically, we highlight the tendency within collective accounts of leadership to emphasize individual expression within collective boundaries (organizations or smaller groups), and the 'natural' synergies that are made possible when expressive individuals engage in open dialogue free from conflict, self-interest and bad faith. Key in such a romanticized account, we suggest, is the vague, even mystical portrayal of leadership. This very vagueness, combined with an affiliation with 'positive'

emotions and states (Collinson, 2012) such as ‘synergy’, ‘consensus’ and ‘hope’, offers a view of leadership as immanently accessible, harmonious and universal, leaving little space for the ‘rupture’ of criticism (Benjamin, 1996).

Chrislip and Larson’s (1994) ‘collaborative leadership’ is a good example of expressive collectivism at work. Focusing explicitly on complex problems facing communities, the authors offer a comprehensive framework for collaboration. Yet the text is replete with the expressive collectivism that we suggest is a defining feature of romanticized leadership. The authors describe their ‘collaborative premise’ as ‘a belief that if you bring the appropriate people together in constructive ways with good information, they will create authentic visions and strategies for addressing the shared concerns of the organization or community’ (p. 14). Underlying this statement is a(n) (extra-rational) ‘belief’ that collaboration represents a kind of natural state of organization, a ‘ground zero’, whereby the simple act of bringing people together with ‘good’ information is sufficient to unleash ‘authenticity’ (undefined). Chrislip and Larson argue that, if one commits wholeheartedly to processes of collaboration, then new and unforeseen possibilities will emerge.

For Chrislip and Larson, inclusivity (1994, p. 75), credibility and openness (pp. 79–80), trust (p. 83), empowerment and inspiration (p. 117) within a collaborative process will yield desired results for a community. Some of these characteristics are more tangible than others: it is not always clear what is meant by ‘empowerment’ or ‘inspiration’ beyond a subjective feeling that most of us know them when we experience them. Nevertheless, a language of inevitability lingers in the text, as if through collaborating, people are part of a natural and immanent force. The process of collaboration is thus portrayed as organic, as ‘natural’, as what people do when unnatural obstacles and interests are removed. Throughout the text, however, the status of leadership is unclear. Leadership seems to equate to participating, albeit with an added sense of ‘hope’, ‘inspiration’ and ‘authenticity’. As in the case of individual-focused theories, leadership appears to serve the function of mystifying or sugar-coating a process that the authors acknowledge can be somewhat gruelling.

The status of leadership seems equally vague in other influential theories of collective leadership. Pearce and Conger’s (2003, p. 1) ‘shared leadership’ is defined as ‘a dynamic, interactive process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organization goals or both’. While Pearce and Sims (2000) provide detailed propositions concerning antecedents to shared leadership, the substantive content of leadership remains vague. Pearce and Conger (2003) sketch a picture of leadership as concerned with influencing ‘vertically’ and ‘horizontally’, ‘more than just downward influence on subordinates’ (p. 1). They later amalgamate influence with knowledge and decision-making. Leadership is characterized as something exercised by people who may know more than the ‘formal leader’ (p. 2) and will therefore be better at making decisions within this sphere of knowledge, provided, of course, they can influence those around them. Detail is lacking, however: leadership seems to enjoy the status of an assumed but vague good, with the right to leadership expression gained via the gateways of knowledge and influence.

Notions of power (either as productive or regressive) are largely absent from accounts of collective leadership. Rather than speak in terms of power, authors prefer to emphasize the role of dialogue and communication as transcendent of power. The work of Drath and colleagues on ‘connected leadership’ (Drath, 2003) and the DAC (direction, alignment and commitment) framework of collective leadership (Drath et al., 2008) exemplifies this conceptual absence of power. These ideas are rooted in a notion that complex problems require alternative approaches to leadership. Yet power and asymmetry are absent in both accounts. In its place, Drath (2003) speaks of ‘shared sense-making’, ‘connection’ and ‘navigation’ (pp. 6–7). The task of leadership is thus framed as sensitivity to the emergence of processes, issues and relationships, with an emphasis on dialogue.

Drath's later work (Drath et al., 2008) is more explicit in offering 'belief' in the absence of alternative signifiers, such as 'power', 'position', 'conflict' etc., 'such as the belief that a shared goal is essential to team effectiveness'; 'beliefs about the characteristics and behaviours of individuals that enhance or hinder the production of DAC'; and 'beliefs about the practices that produce DAC, such as the belief that it is a duty to obey the legal commands of a superior officer, the belief that decisions affecting everyone should be made by consensus, or the belief that strategy should be set by top managers' (p. 644). In the absence of an engagement with power and inequity, DAC asks for 'personal commitment that survives disagreement, conflict, and confusion' (p. 648). Such romantic support for 'the party line' would not look out of place in Orwell's *1984* or totalitarian societies.

Returning to Chrislip and Larson's (1994) account of collaborative leadership, one finds that these authors emphasize 'inclusive' and 'consensual' leadership, a 'shift from hostility to civility, from advocacy to engagement, from confrontation to conversation, from debate to dialogue, and from separation to community' (p. 4). Issues of power and conflict are thereby relegated to an undesirable contradistinction to a range of alternative, more expressive and harmonious signifiers. Power and conflict are to be *overcome* through intensive engagement, rather than identified and reflected upon, through individual acts of expression within a collective.

The foregoing romanticized accounts primarily emphasize harmony in collective leadership. No levers are offered through which one might critically engage with romanticized accounts of collective leadership outside the appreciative limits offered. Exploitative, prejudicial or oppressive practices are not accounted for within the romanticized category of 'leadership': such behaviour is simply regarded as not-leadership.

Expressive leadering

The premium placed upon critique-free expression within collective accounts of leadership perhaps reaches an apex in the tendency of such studies to marginalize, or even entirely eradicate, the figure of the follower. We refer to the process of transferring heroic properties previously associated with individual leaders to the collective as one of 'expressive leadering': the collective of individuals becomes the unit of leadership agency to such an extent that the category of 'follower' becomes redundant. The ability to express oneself, held as the organizational ideal within romanticized perspectives, seems to require a category more prestigious than 'follower', with its associations of subservience (Ford & Harding, 2015).

Gronn (2002) argues that distributed leadership should 'dispense with the category of follower-ship' (p. 427) and think of leadership as 'evident in the interaction of many leaders' (p. 420). He attempts to circumnavigate power imbalances by emphasizing 'conjoint agency' (p. 431) between leaders. For Gronn, the potential value of distributed leadership lies in the force offered to 'concertive action', where the collective effect of the relationships between leaders are held as more powerful than the sum of their individual expertise. Ford and Harding (2015) argue that this is a utopian account of collective leadership that fails to recognize the necessity of followers in any configuration of leadership: i.e. one cannot lead if no one will follow. Abolishing the category of followers within distributed leadership means, according to Ford and Harding, that a climate of uncritical positivity is allowed to dominate, and the tendency for research in this area to focus on top teams might also help to explain this (Chreim, 2015).

Expressive leadering also manifests as a transference of individualized, heroic qualities onto collective processes. The role of processes within a romanticized view of collective leadership is to provide an appropriate forum where people can express themselves freely. Chrislip and Larson (1994)'s collaborative leadership does not challenge the underlying, expressive assumption of

transformational leadership, arguing instead that participants in collaborative leadership are required to demonstrate ‘transforming leadership’ through a preoccupation with process (p. 146). There is little room for followers in such a system.

Rather than privileging leaders over followers, Raelin’s notion of ‘leaderful’ practice, or leadership-as-practice (L-A-P) (2003, 2011, 2016a, 2016b) seeks to transcend the issue by ‘reframing’ (2016a, p. 131) the unit of analysis of leadership as emergent and continuous collaborative practice between people, ‘the activity of all those who are engaged’ (Raelin, 2016a, p. 134). Consequently, ‘follower’ becomes a problematic category because organizational participants think of being a follower in subaltern terms. Instead, L-A-P is conceptualized as something abiding by ‘the norms of the democratic tradition’ (Raelin, 2011, p. 198). By ‘democratic tradition’, Raelin means participatory and deliberative practices. His emphasis is thus on establishing the conditions necessary for free expression, for ‘mutual control’ (2011, p. 200), ‘mutual adjustment, shared sense-making, dialogue, and collaborative learning’ (2011, p. 202). Agency, for Raelin, thus resides in ‘intersubjective collaborative process’ (2011, p. 199).

Raelin offers a normative view of how leadership ought to be enacted, rather than a means for researching specific relationships and practices. Thus, leadership holds an inherently positive connotation associated with certain democratic norms of equality and freedom to participate. Practice that strays outside these boundaries of freedom to participate is not to be thought of as leadership at all. This, of course, assumes that democracy is itself free of political inequalities; the other side of the leadership coin, which insists that only (undefined) ‘moral’ or ‘ethical’ leadership is ‘real leadership’; hence the infamous Hitler Problem (see Ciulla, 2004). From this perspective leadership comprises only leaders (i.e. it is ‘leaderful’).

Raelin presents a view of leadership as associated with more egalitarian practices and relationships. He also specifies certain tests to determine what does or does not qualify as leadership. This is problematic because leaderful practice does not allow for the possibility of leadership manifesting in paradoxical, conflictual or contradictory terms. It is also a perspective where process is sovereign. This view of leadership seems to romanticize process above other valid considerations and concerns. Missing from leaderful practice and L-A-P is the possibility of critical rupture, a consideration that leaders, or followers, might distort or co-opt ‘leaderful’ language or practice in order to strengthen their material positioning within an organization; make unpleasant or oppressive practices seem more palatable; or as a means of manipulating the emotions of others concerning work. Leadership as a community of free self-expression is held as an ultimate good. In this sense the collective community replaces the individual leader, the spirit realm or nature, as the site of romantic elevation. But, as Leonard’s (2010) empirical study of senior public-sector managers demonstrates, even collectives charged with leading change in their own organizations have a tendency to displace responsibility elsewhere. When asked to ‘share leadership’, collectives can struggle to reach a consensus that facilitates effective decision-making.

Romanticizing Followers

Some writers have observed that leadership romanticism reinforces the ‘subordination of followership’ (Uhl-Bien & Pillai, 2007, p. 187). Alternatively, as the foregoing section argued, collective leadership theories often propose the complete eradication of the notion of followership based on romanticized conceptions of collective leadership. In this final section we suggest that the concept of followership remains important, but we also highlight how conceptions of followers, their agency and oppositional practices can equally be characterized by romanticizing tendencies: a theme neglected in Meindl et al.’s (1985) paper.²

In his later work Meindl (1995) (and we recognize that Meindl and colleagues wrote a number of papers on leadership that have not been discussed here) seeks to escape the confines of romanticism by developing a framework for studying leadership from the perspective of followers. He proposes that researchers should no longer be concerned at all with leaders, and should concentrate on followers' views of leaders, at both an individual and group level. Such processes in Meindl's model inform a construction of what good leadership ought to look like, against which leaders are judged and follower responses to leaders are shaped.

In doing so, however, Meindl seems to fall into his own trap of romanticism. If leadership should be approached as a matter of follower attribution, then is one romance simply being replaced with another case of romantic infatuation? By eschewing *any* consideration of leaders in favour of an exclusive focus on followers, Meindl seems to invert, and then reproduce, a dichotomy between leaders and followers. In addition, although Meindl claims to be subverting the dominant focus of leadership studies, the individual leader remains at the core of Meindl's (1995) followership model. It is leaders who are supposed to preoccupy the thinking of Meindl's followers: the latter remain enamoured by their (ideal) leaders. Little scope is allowed for a conception of leadership that challenges these boundaries and so we remain trapped within the walls of leader-centrism. Equally neglected in Meindl's paper is any detailed consideration of follower agency and dissent.

Research in organization studies demonstrates that (followers'/employees') oppositional practices can take numerous forms (Ackroyd & Thompson, 1999) including strikes, 'working to rule', output restriction, 'working the system', 'whistleblowing' and sabotage (Edwards, Collinson, & Rocca, 1995). In exceptional cases, subordinates may even (seek to) depose leaders (Mole, 2004), and social anthropologists have long noted the ability of subordinates to organize 'reverse dominance hierarchies' to discipline or displace unpopular leaders (Boehm, 1993). Through oppositional practices followers can try to change and improve their situation. They can express discontent, exercise a degree of control over work processes and/or construct alternative, more positive identities to those prescribed by organizations. In leadership studies it is only relatively recently that the analytical significance of resistance has been acknowledged (Banks, 2008; Zoller & Fairhurst, 2007). While it is important to recognize the importance of opposition and dissent in organizational leadership dynamics, we also argue that such conceptualizations of resistance need to avoid romanticized thinking.

One of the ways that romanticism can characterize the study of resistance is in under-estimating the barriers to follower dissent. For example, Chaleff (2009, 2015) advocates that 'courageous' followers need to voice 'intelligent disobedience' and constructive criticism, particularly when they believe that leaders are not acting in the best interests of the organization. Yet, such recommendations tend to underestimate the costs and overestimate the possibilities of explicit dissent in organizations. For example, studies of whistle-blowing suggest that followers who express their concerns in precisely the way advocated by Chaleff need to recognize that their actions might be career-damaging and may even result in being fired (Barron, Crawley, & Paulina, 2003; Miceli & Near, 2002). For many employees, the prospect of being disciplined for expressing dissent and of having to find another job can be daunting. The ensuing material (salary) and symbolic (erosion of autonomy and self-respect) insecurities can significantly limit overt dissent. By underestimating the hierarchical nature of power asymmetries, post-heroic perspectives may replace the privileging of leaders with the romanticism of 'heroic followers'.

Resistance romanticism can also occur in cases where radical researchers automatically attribute subversive or even revolutionary motives or outcomes to follower/employee dissent, for example when referring to workers as 'class warriors' (e.g. Beynon, 1980; Nichols & Beynon, 1977). A small number of writers have questioned this tendency to

romanticize resistance. Kondo (1990, p. 224) cautions against any tendency automatically to impute a subversive or emancipatory motive or outcome to resistance. She contends that there is no such thing as an entirely 'authentic' or 'pristine space of resistance' or of a 'true resister'. Observing that people simultaneously 'consent, cope, and resist at different levels of consciousness at a single point in time', Kondo questions the idealization of the term 'resistance'.

Other researchers have sought to de-romanticize resistance by pointing to its potentially paradoxical processes and outcomes (e.g. Ashcraft, 2005; Fleming & Spicer, 2003). They suggest that apparently oppositional practices may unintentionally reinforce the very conditions of power and control that stimulated resistance in the first place. Their focus on the consequences of employee resistance helps to avoid overly romanticized interpretations that celebrate, rather than critically examine, follower opposition.³ These studies also reveal how opposition can itself embody elements of domination. For example, Cockburn (1983) showed how the oppositional practices of male-dominated trade unions in the UK printing industry excluded women and/or segregated them into subordinated work. Hence, in this case male workers' organized resistance to management had the effect of reinforcing women's subordination.

In sum, we propose that the leadership romanticism thesis needs to be extended to recognize how follower agency and resistance can also be subject to romanticized interpretations. This is not to dismiss the theoretical and empirical importance of resistance in organizational leadership dynamics, but rather to recognize that romanticized thinking can constrain the analysis of follower agency and opposition, just as it can in the case of individual and collective leadership theories.

Conclusion

This article has sought to re-assert the critical value of the romance of leadership thesis, and to extend its framework for contemporary leadership studies. In so doing it has also been concerned to contribute to more critical readings of leadership dynamics (e.g. Alvesson & Spicer, 2012; Collinson, 2011, 2012, 2014; Tourish, 2013). Arguing that romanticism stretches beyond leader attribution, the paper has suggested that the implications of romanticized thinking continue to have considerable significance for contemporary theorizing on leadership and followership. In the post-Meindl era, many scholars remain fixated by a romanticized view of leadership, ignoring the challenge of the romanticism critique or side-stepping its critical emphasis in ways that, ironically, seem to romanticize romanticism. As a result, leadership research continues to be characterized by romanticizing tendencies in relation not only to leaders but also to followers and their potential for resistance. Like leadership, followership is an important area where romanticism can emerge and thus a significant theme where the original thesis can be extended.

We therefore propose that the romance of leadership thesis has more far-reaching implications for contemporary leadership studies than is often recognized. Romanticized leadership can be thought of as a tendency and discourse of deeper significance than that previously related to a particular view of leader attribution. While leader attribution foregrounds some of the snares of romanticized thinking, it does not explore the deeper aesthetic, philosophical and historical roots of such thinking. We have made the case that leader attribution can be connected to a stream of romantic thought that 'naturalizes': an all-powerful nature is made accessible via a privileged human imagination. Romanticized leadership stretches further, however, into accounts of collective leadership that place a premium on freedom of individual expression, on harmony over power and on the process of expressive leadering, whereby all that is deemed positive in organizations is labelled leadership and all that is bad is excluded as irrelevant. Informed by the insights of Benjamin (1996) into Romantic criticism, our discussion has revealed how contemporary leadership theories in both their individual and collective forms

often stay faithful to an immanent and intense form of appreciation, reproducing romanticizing themes and bypassing critique.

Meindl et al. (1985) were concerned to highlight ‘the prominence of the concept of leadership in our collective consciousness’. We have sought to extend this analysis to explore the prominence of *romanticism* in a much larger number of perspectives within leadership studies. Although our focus here has been on the history of romantic discourse and its applicability to leadership scholarship, we might pause to reflect on *why* such romanticism is equally at play in contemporary leadership writing as it was in the work of 18th-century poets, artists and writers. Although an exhaustive analysis is beyond the remit of this paper, we might reflect that the forms of alienation felt by the Romantics to the perceived coldness of Enlightenment reason could be said to have become yet more pronounced in contemporary societies.

As voting publics express anger towards what they view as distant, impersonal, technocratic and corrupt power ruling over them (in the European Union, in the USA, and other transnational institutions, international trade deals, and so on), they are turning to politicians and parties of the extreme right, who promise a return to mythical golden eras (Ford & Goodwin, 2014; Frank, 2012; McGowan, 2013). In this turbulent climate it is perhaps to be expected that some leadership scholars, employed in increasingly instrumentally focused institutions, themselves search beyond the mundane of more conventional organizational theory into the more mystical edges of leadership. Many scholars seem so invested in unfolding the possibilities of leadership that they neglect or avoid the ruptures, tensions and contradictions in the practices and theories of leadership. In some cases, we note the material investment many scholars hold in the concept of leadership, particularly in relation to their consultancy and leadership development activities. Adopting the identity and practices of the critic, as Benjamin was only too aware, may not prove to be as materially lucrative. Nevertheless, we argue that, rather than reproducing these romanticizing tendencies in leadership research and writing, there is a pressing need for scholars to revisit and embrace the critical roots and implications of the romanticism thesis.

Bearing in mind the continuing allure of romantic thinking in leadership theory and practice, our broader interpretation of romanticism carries the potential, we argue, to open up valuable new directions for leadership studies. This requires leadership scholars to adopt the stance of the aesthetic and cultural critic, approaching the task of leadership criticism by opening up and addressing points of rupture, tension, paradox and contradiction. This more critical stance therefore involves embracing the generative possibilities inherent in the rupturing and disrupting of leadership romanticism. We conclude by providing various possible directions for such de-romanticized critical engagement.

There is now a growing literature on leadership hubris and its relationship to the enactment of power (Claxton, Owen, & Sadler-Smith, 2015). Building on this work, further research could examine the processes through which power and identity are socially constructed and manufactured, for example, through self-romanticism and self-mythologizing. The narcissistic dynamics of self-romanticism would seem to be highly relevant to the study of both leadership and followership. Critical research could also explore how the language and discourses of leadership may reflect and reinforce romanticism. Further research could ask what happens in the post-romantic phase, when followers become disenchanted with the leaders they previously placed on a pedestal. What are the conditions, processes and consequences of follower disillusionment? Future research could also examine the gendered dynamics through which men may be especially prone to elevate other men as leaders, and to try to reinforce male leaders’ power and authority, while securing themselves through forms of masculine ‘prestige by association’.

Finally, and underpinning many of the foregoing questions, is the under-explored relationship between romanticism and the search for heroes. The notion of the hero has a long *his*-tory (sic) in

human thought (e.g. Hook, 1943). For example, the psychological study of (male and female) heroes was significantly shaped by the Freudian-inspired work of Rank (2015) whose important text *The myth of the birth of the hero* was first published in 1909 (see also the Jungian-influenced ideas of Campbell (1949) on the mythology of the ‘hero’s journey’). Rank’s ideas on human ‘immortality ideologies’ were subsequently developed by the cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker (1971, 1973) who argued that society can be viewed as an elaborate hero system facilitating the cultivation of human self-esteem, which in turn acts as a defence mechanism against the knowledge of our mortality. Becker argued that heroism was an ‘immortality project’ providing humans with a way to try to transcend their fear of death.

The focus on heroes has had an enduring influence in leadership theory and practice, particularly through the so-called ‘great man’ theory (Carlyle, 1841/1993; Spector, 2016), and it continues to be influential in popular leadership publications (e.g. Cohen, 2010; Sebag Montefiore, 2009, 2012). Interest in leaders as heroes is especially extensive in the US (e.g. Allison & Goethals, 2011; Allison, Goethals, & Kramer, 2017), where this way of thinking resonates strongly with the dominant culture of individualism. We argue that more research from a critical perspective on the relationship between romanticism and heroism could raise important issues, for example, about gender and masculinity (Boon, 2005), as well as race and ethnicity (Liu & Baker, 2016). Informed by the foregoing early psychoanalytical ideas, critical research could also surface important questions about romanticism and death, with recent research suggesting that followers’ ascriptions of charisma tend to increase after a leader dies (Steffens, Peters, Haslam, & van Dick, 2016). In sum, further research could critically examine the seductive image of the hero and its various interrelationships with the continued allure of romanticism in leadership studies.

It is our case that romanticizing leadership can be equal parts bewitching, disingenuous and harmful. Romanticizing leadership is bewitching because it offers a lexical account of leadership drenched with imprecise mystique. It can be disingenuous and harmful by offering a self-fulfilling account of leadership where critique is excluded from its logic. Romanticizing leadership asks that we engage with leadership as an exceptional case, a privileged unit of thought that seeks to hold a transcendent position above the fray of political or historical critique. Engagement is only possible in the here-and-now of the theory, in its ‘natural’ state. But this is just a romanticized mirror image of an ideology that promises salvation in the next world – providing we comply in this one. In the leadership romance, salvation is promised either by an individual hero or a collective hero in this world, – but it is still a hero and we should not look beyond this world just in case we recognize that we have been here, waiting for, and failed by, heroes, in the past. When are we going to stop looking for heroes and recognize that, in the words of the Hopi Indians, ‘we are the ones we have been waiting for’, warts and all?

Acknowledgement

Thanks to the Associate Editor Yiannis Gabriel and the three anonymous reviewers for their helpful feedback on the earlier version of this paper.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Notes

The title, ‘No more heroes’, was inspired by the 1977 classic UK punk rock anthem of the same name by the rock band, The Stranglers.

1. As we discuss later, Meindl's single-authored 1995 chapter takes a different perspective to the co-authored 1985 paper, where the romanticizing impulse is more broadly conceived and attributed.
2. It is also important to recall that romanticism as a movement was fundamentally about protest and resistance, concerned to critique that which had been lost in the Enlightenment (Lowy & Sayre, 2001).
3. These arguments in turn raise important questions about the meaning of resistance, about who resists, how, why and when they do so, what strategies inform their practices, and what outcomes ensue.

References

- Ackroyd, S., & Thompson, P. (1999). *Organizational misbehaviour*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Allison, S., & Goethals, G. (2011). *Heroes: What they do and why we need them*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Allison, S., Goethals, G., & Kramer, R. (Eds.) (2017). *Handbook of heroism and heroic leadership*. New York: Routledge.
- Alvarez, J. L., & Svejenova, S. (2005). *Sharing executive power: Roles and relationships at the top*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Alvesson, M., & Spicer, A. (2012). Critical leadership studies: The case for critical performativity. *Human Relations*, 65, 367–390.
- Archer, D., & Cameron, A. (2008). *Collaborative leadership: How to succeed in an interconnected world*. London: Butterworth Heinemann.
- Ashcraft, K. (2005). Resistance through consent? Occupational identity, organizational form, and the maintenance of masculinity among commercial airline pilots. *Management Communications Quarterly*, 19, 67–91.
- Avolio, B., Gardner, W., Walumbwa, F., Luthans, F., & May, D. (2004). Unlocking the mask: A look at the process by which authentic leaders impact follower attitudes and behaviours. *Leadership Quarterly*, 15, 801–823.
- Banks, S. (Ed.) (2008). *Dissent and the failure of leadership*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.
- Barker, R. (2002). *On the nature of leadership*. Lanham, MD: University of America Press.
- Baron, R. S., Crawley, K., & Paulina, D. (2003). Aberrations of power: Leadership in totalist groups. In D. van Knippenberg & M. A. Hogg (Eds.), *Leadership and power: Identity processes in groups and organizations* (pp. 169–183). London: SAGE Publications.
- Becker, E. (1971). *The birth and death of meaning*. New York: Free Press.
- Becker, E. (1973). *The denial of death*. New York: Free Press.
- Benefiel, M. (2005). The second half of the journey: Spiritual leadership for organizational transformation. *Leadership Quarterly*, 16, 723–747.
- Benjamin, W. (1996). *Selected writings volume 1, 1913–1926*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Berlin, I. (1965/2000). *The roots of romanticism*. London: Random House.
- Beynon, H. (1980). *Working for Ford*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Blakeley, K. (2016). Responsible leadership: A radical view. In S. Kempster & B. Carroll (Eds.), *Responsible leadership: Realism and romanticism* (pp. 108–130). London: Routledge.
- Blanning, T. (2010). *The romantic revolution*. London: Phoenix.
- Bligh, M. (2011). Followership and follower centred approaches. In A. Bryman, D. Collinson, K. Grint, B. Jackson, & M. Uhl-Bien. (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of leadership* (pp. 423–434). London: SAGE Publications.
- Bligh, M., & Schyns, B. (2007). The romance lives on: Contemporary issues surrounding the romance of leadership. *Leadership*, 3, 343–360.
- Boehm, C. (1993). Egalitarian behaviour and reverse dominance hierarchy. *Current Anthropology*, 34, 227–254.
- Boon, K. (2005). Heroes, metanarratives, and the paradox of masculinity in contemporary western culture. *Journal of Men's Studies*, 13, 301–312.
- Brinkmann, S. (2017). *Stand firm: Resisting the self-improvement craze*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Campbell, J. (1949). *The hero with a thousand faces*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Carlyle, T. (1841/1993). *On heroes, hero-worship and the heroic in history*. Berkeley, CA; Oxford: University of California Press.

- Cederström, C., & Spicer, A. (2015). *The wellness syndrome*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Chaleff, I. (2009). *The courageous follower*, 3rd edition. Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler.
- Chaleff, I. (2015). *Intelligent disobedience*. Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler.
- Chen, C., Yang, C., & Li, C. (2012). Spiritual leadership, follower mediators and organizational outcomes: Evidence from three industries across two major Chinese societies. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 42, 890–938.
- Chreim, S. (2015). The (non)distribution of leadership roles: Considering leadership practices and configurations. *Human Relations*, 68, 517–543.
- Chrislip, D., & Larson, C. (1994). *Collaborative leadership: How citizens and civic leaders can make a difference*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Claxton, G., Owen, D., & Sadler-Smith, E. (2015). Hubris in leadership: A peril of unbridled intuition? *Leadership*, 11, 57–78.
- Cockburn, C. (1983). *Brothers: Male dominance and technological change*. London: Pluto Press.
- Collins, J. C. (2001). *Good to great*. London: Random House.
- Collinson, D. (2011). Critical leadership studies. In A. Bryman, D. Collinson, K. Grint, B. Jackson, & M. Uhl-Bien (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of leadership* (pp. 179–192). London: Sage.
- Collinson, D. (2012). Prozac leadership and the limits of positive thinking. *Leadership*, 8, 87–107.
- Collinson, D. (2014). Dichotomies, dialectics and dilemmas: New directions for critical leadership studies? *Leadership*, 10, 36–55.
- Cohen, W. (2010). *Heroic leadership: Leading with integrity and honour*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Ciulla, J. (2004). *Ethics: The heart of leadership*. Westport, CT: Praeger Press.
- Drath, W. (2003). Leading together: Complex challenges require a new approach. *Leadership in Action*, 23, 3–7.
- Drath, W., McCauley, C., Palus, C., Van Velsor, E., O'Connor, P., & McGuire, J. (2008). Direction, alignment, commitment: Toward a more integrative ontology of leadership. *Leadership Quarterly*, 19, 635–653.
- Eagleton, T. (1983). *Literary theory: An introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Edwards, P., Collinson, D., & Rocca, G.D. (1995). Workplace resistance in Western Europe. *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 1, 283–316.
- Fairhurst, G. (2009). Considering context in discursive leadership research. *Human Relations*, 62, 1607–1633.
- Ferber, M. (2010). *Romanticism: A very short introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fitzpatrick, M. (1999). Enlightenment. In I. McCalman (Ed.), *An Oxford companion to the romantic age*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fleming, P., & Spicer, A. (2003). Working at a cynical distance: Implications for power, subjectivity and resistance. *Organization*, 10, 157–179.
- Ford, J., & Harding, N. (2007). Move over management: We are all leaders now. *Management Learning*, 38, 475–493.
- Ford, J., & Harding, N. (2015). Followers in leadership theory: Fiction, fantasy and illusion. *Leadership*. First published online 18 December 2015.
- Ford, R., & Goodwin, M. (2014). *Revolt on the right: Explaining support for the radical right in Britain*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Foucault, M. (1991). What is Enlightenment? In P. Rabinow (Ed.), *The Foucault reader* (pp. 32–50). New York: Pantheon.
- Frank, T. (2012). *Pity the billionaire: The unlikely comeback of the American right*. London: Vintage.
- Fry, L. (2003). Toward a theory of spiritual leadership. *Leadership Quarterly*, 14, 693–727.
- Fry, L., Vitucci, S., & Cedillo, M. (2005). Spiritual leadership and army transformation: Theory, measurement and establishing a baseline. *Leadership Quarterly*, 16, 835–862.
- Gabriel, Y. (2012). Organizations in a state of darkness: Towards a theory of organizational miasma. *Organization Studies*, 33, 1137–1152.
- Gardner, W., Fischer, D., & Hunt, J. (2009). Emotional labor and leadership: A threat to authenticity? *Leadership Quarterly*, 20, 466–482.
- Greenleaf, R. (1977). *Servant leadership*. New York: Paulist Press. 25th anniversary edition (2002).

- Grint, K. (2005). Problems, problems, problems: The social construction of 'leadership'. *Human Relations*, 58, 1467–1494.
- Gronn, P. (2002). Distributed leadership as a unit of analysis. *Leadership Quarterly*, 13, 423–451.
- Hale, J. R., & Fields, D. L. (2007). Exploring servant leadership across cultures. *Leadership*, 3, 397–417.
- Hay, D. (2010). *Young romantics: The Shelleys, Byron and other tangled lives*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Heifetz, R. (1994). *Leadership without easy answers*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Holmes, R. (2009). *The age of wonder: How the romantic generation discovered the beauty and terror of science*. London: Harper Press.
- Hook, S. (1943). *The hero in history*. London: Secker & Warburg.
- Jeffries, S. (2016). *Grand Hotel abyss: The lives of the Frankfurt School*. London: Verso.
- Jepson, D. (2009). Studying leadership at cross-country level. *Leadership*, 5, 61–80.
- Kagan, R. (2016). This is how fascism comes to America. *Washington Post*, 17 May.
- Kellerman, B. (2007). What every leader needs to know about followership. *Harvard Business Review*, 85(12), 84–91.
- Kempster, S., & Carroll, B. (Eds.) (2016). *Responsible leadership: Realism and romanticism*. London: Routledge.
- Kondo, D. (1990). *Crafting selves: Power, gender and discourses of identity in a Japanese workplace*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Lee, S., & Higgs, M. (2016). This green pastoral landscape: Values, responsible leadership and the romantic imagination. In S. Kempster & B. Carroll (Eds.), *Responsible leadership: Realism and romanticism* (pp. 61–88). London: Routledge.
- Leonard, P. (2010). *Leading without authority* (unpublished PhD, Lancaster University).
- Liu, H., & Baker, C. (2016). White knights: Leadership as the heroicisation of whiteness. *Leadership*, 12, 420–448.
- Lowy, M., & Sayre, R. (2001). *Romanticism against the tide of modernity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- May, D., Chan, A., Hodges, T., & Avolio, B. (2003). Developing the moral component of authentic leadership. *Organizational Dynamics*, 32, 247–260.
- McGowan, T. (2013). *Enjoying what we don't have: The political project of psychoanalysis*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Meindl, J. (1995). The romance of leadership as a follower-centric theory: A social constructionist approach. *Leadership Quarterly*, 6, 329–341.
- Meindl, J., Ehrlich, S., & Dukerich, J. (1985). The romance of leadership. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 30, 78–102.
- Miceli, M. P., & Near, J. P. (2002). What makes whistle-blowers effective? Three field studies. *Human Relations*, 55, 455–479.
- Mitroff, I., & Denton, E. (1999). A study of spirituality in the workplace. *Sloan Management Review*, summer edition.
- Mole, G. (2004). Can leadership be taught? In J. Storey (Ed.), *Leadership in organizations: Current issues and key trends* (pp. 125–137). London: Routledge.
- Murphy, P., & Roberts, D. (2004). *Dialectic of romanticism*. London: Continuum.
- Nichols, T., & Beynon, H. (1977). *Living with capitalism*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- O'Reilly, D., & Reed, M. (2011). The grit in the oyster: Professionalism, managerialism and leadership as discourses of UK public services modernization. *Organization Studies*, 32, 1079–1101.
- Parry, K., & Jackson, B. (2016). Promoting responsibility, purpose and romanticism in business schools. In S. Kempster & B. Carroll (Eds.), *Responsible leadership: Realism and romanticism* (pp. 149–162). London: Routledge.
- Pearce, C., & Conger, J. (2003). *Shared leadership: Reframing the hows and whys of leadership*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Pearce, C., & Sims, H. (2000). Shared leadership: Toward a multi-level theory of leadership. *Team Development*, 7, 115–139.

- Porter, R. (Ed.) (2001). *The Cambridge illustrated history of medicine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Raelin, J. (2003). *Creating leaderful organizations: How to bring out leadership in everyone*. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler.
- Raelin, J. (2011). From leadership-as-practice to leaderful practice. *Leadership*, 7, 195–211.
- Raelin, J. (2016a). Imagine there are no leaders: Reframing leadership as collaborative agency. *Leadership*, 12, 131–158. First published online 25 November 2014.
- Raelin, J. (2016b). Introduction to leadership-as-practice: Theory and application. In J. Raelin (Ed.), *Leadership-as-practice: Theory and application* (pp. 1–18). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Rank, O. (2015). *The myth of the birth of the hero*. Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Riasanovsky, N. (1995). *The emergence of romanticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ricketts, K. G., & Ladewig, H. (2008). A path analysis of community leadership within viable rural communities in Florida. *Leadership*, 4, 137–157.
- Riggio, R. E., & Reichard, R. J. (2008). The emotional and social intelligences of effective leadership: An emotional and social skill approach. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 23, 169–185.
- Rosenzweig, P. (2014). *The halo effect*. New York: Free Press.
- Sebag Montefiore, S. (2009). *Heroes: History's greatest men and women*. London: Quercus.
- Sebag Montefiore, S. (2012). *Titans of history*. London: Quercus.
- Shamir, B., Pillai, R., Bligh, M., & Uhl-Bien, M. (2007). *Follower-centred perspectives on leadership: A tribute to the memory of James R. Meindl*. Greenwich, CT: Information Age.
- Smircich, L., & Morgan, G. (1982). Leadership: The management of meaning. *Journal of Applied Behavioural Science*, 18, 257–273.
- Smolović Jones, O., & Grint, K. (2013). Authentic leadership and history. In D. Ladkin & C. Spiller (Eds.), *Authentic leadership: Clashes, convergences and coalescences*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.
- Smolović Jones, O., Grint, K., & Cammock, C. (2015). Public leadership development facilitation and the crossroads blues. *Management Learning*, 46, 391–411.
- Spector, B. (2016). Carlyle, Freud and the great man theory more fully considered. *Leadership*, 12, 250–260.
- Steffens, N., Peters, K., Haslam, A., & van Dick, R. (2016). Dying for charisma: Leaders' inspirational appeal increases post-mortem. *Leadership Quarterly*. First published online 9 September.
- Surowiecki, J. (2005). *The wisdom of crowds: Why the many are smarter than the few*. New York: Random House.
- Swan, E. (2010). *Worked up selves: Personal development workers, self-work and therapeutic cultures*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tammet, D. (2009). *Embracing the wide sky: A tour across the horizons of the mind*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Tourish, D. (2013). *The dark side of transformational leadership*. Hove, UK: Routledge.
- Tourish, D., & Tourish, N. (2010). Spirituality at work, and its implications for leadership and followership: A post-structuralist perspective. *Leadership*, 6, 207–224.
- Uhl-Bien, M., & Pillai, R. (2007). The romance of leadership and the social construction of followership. In B. Shamir, B. R. Pillai, M. Bligh, & M. Uhl-Bien (eds.), *Follower-centred perspectives on leadership* (pp. 187–209). Greenwich, CT: Information Age.
- Uhl-Bien, M., Riggio, R., Lowe, K., & Carsten, M. (2014). Followership theory: A review and research agenda. *Leadership Quarterly*, 25, 83–104.
- Vince, R., & Mazen, A. (2014). Violent innocence: A contradiction at the heart of leadership. *Organization Studies*, 35, 189–207.
- Walumbwa, F., Avolio, B., Gardner, W., Wernsing, T., & Peterson, S. (2008). Authentic leadership: Development and validation of a theory-based measure. *Journal of Management*, 34, 89–126.
- Weinberg, F., & Locander, W. (2014). Advancing workplace spiritual development: A dyadic mentoring approach. *Leadership Quarterly*, 25, 391–408.
- Whittington, J., Pitts, T., Kageler, W., & Goodwin, V. (2005). Legacy leadership: The leadership wisdom of the Apostle Paul. *Leadership Quarterly*, 16, 749–770.

Zoller, H., & Fairhurst, G. (2007). Resistance leadership: The overlooked potential in critical organization and leadership studies. *Human Relations*, *60*, 1331–1360.

Author biographies

David Collinson is Distinguished Professor of Leadership and Organization at Lancaster University Management School. He is the founding co-editor (with Keith Grint) of the SAGE journal *Leadership* and founding co-organizer of The International Studying Leadership Conference. Previously at the universities of Manchester, Warwick, St Andrews and South Florida, David has published extensively on critical approaches to leadership and management; gender and masculinity, and power and identity.

Owain Smolović Jones is Senior Lecturer in People Management and Organisation at the Open University Business School. His research is primarily focused on the political, aesthetic and ethical dimensions of leadership. Prior to embarking on an academic career, he worked in communications for the Labour Party (UK).

Keith Grint is Professor of Public Leadership at Warwick Business School. Keith spent 10 years working in various positions across a number of industry sectors before switching to an academic career. Previously he was Professor of Defence Leadership at Cranfield University, directed the Lancaster University Leadership Centre and was Research Director at the Said Business School, Oxford University. Keith has published in numerous journals and books in influencing, leadership and change.