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**Feeding Greedy Corpses: the rhetorical power of  
Corpspeak and Zombilingo in higher education, and  
suggested countermagics to foil the intentions of the living  
dead**

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*This essay identifies and examines two living-dead languages—Corpspeak and Zombilingo—and how they buttress a particular ideology, specifically in the context of higher education. Their rhetoric, use of metaphor, and vocabularies promote a narrative that highlights ‘dead but dominant’ (Peck 2010, p. 108) ideas and values upon which depends the contemporary economic ‘monoculture’ (Michaels 2011). In universities, terms of reference that relate to education and scholarship are replaced with others that inculcate corporate values at the expense of pedagogical, research, aesthetic, or public interests. In Corpspeak, the prevailing economic rationalist ideology is represented as reasonable and inevitable, when arguably it is neither, and as this article will demonstrate, is also grossly limiting to the intellect and the imagination. After defining the nature and functions of both languages and examining their impact in universities, this article suggests strategies of resistance to colonization by the dead or the ghastly.*

**Introduction**

*‘False words create evil in the soul’.*

*(Attributed to Socrates)*

Many thinkers have responded to the effects on language of the incursion of inapt ideology-laden vocabulary and collocations. George Orwell’s (1949) ‘Newspeak’, Pierre Bourdieu and Loic Wacquant’s (2001) ‘NewLiberalSpeak’, and Don Watson’s (2003) ‘weasel words’ demonstrate from different perspectives the virulence of language used

to promote agendas of, respectively, war and power, neoliberalism (as defined below), and corporate interests. Communications consultant Anat Shenker-Osorio (2012) and economists Mariana Mazzucato (2013) and John Quiggin (2012) have noted the effects within their areas of expertise, while educationalist Henry Giroux (2002, 2006), and linguists Norman Fairclough (2000, 1993) and Alison Phipps (2007, 2009, 2010) have focused on the impact on education of languages of the dead. I have dubbed these languages 'Corpspeak' and 'Zombilingo'. The methods employed in this essay are argumentative and textual, approached by means of 'theory shopping' (Amad cited in Hartley 1996, p. 6) from a range of contexts. It is also a transdisciplinary exercise in that the fictive mode with which I became familiar as an author and reader of fantasy and horror fiction informs my argument and style of presentation.

The term 'neoliberalism' (also called economic rationalism or market liberalism) is a mutable one used to enhance a variety of ideological viewpoints. In this essay a neoliberal perspective, following Paul Verhaege (2014), is one that demonstrates implicit faith in the ability of market forces to regulate social, political and cultural activities. Bourdieu describes it as 'a sort of universal belief, a new ecumenical gospel' (1998 p. 126). The fear of the consequences, should we be seduced into worshipping any other idol, is caricatured by that esteemed zeitgeist-meter and cultural monitor, television series *South Park*: "There are those who will say the Economy has forsaken us. Nay! You have forsaken the Economy. And now you will know the Economy's wrath" (in Shenker-Osorio 2012, p. x). Like a monotheism, our economic monoculture dominates through the power of image-making and through logos: the terms of reference used to describe and promote its narrative, whose 'single perspective [has become] so ingrained as the only reasonable reality that we begin to forget our other stories' (Michaels 2013, p. 13).

Bourdieu and Shenker-Osorio have identified a peculiar kind of religiosity at the heart of neoliberal economics. By 'religious' I refer to the suspicion that it is a belief-based rather than an evidence-based ideology that supports market suprematism, or what McKenzie Wark and Jennifer Mills have named 'thanaticism', after the Greek daemon personifying death: 'Thanaticism: like a fanaticism, a gleeful, overly enthusiastic will to death. The slight echo of Thatcherism is useful also' (Wark 2014, np). This essay is concerned primarily with how the language of the dead—or rather 'undead'—supports this creed that continues to dominate almost every aspect of human endeavour today.

Zombilingo and Corpspeak are means of disseminating a worldview maintained by faith in market forces, belief in individualistic striving, and anxiety associated with fear of displeasing the deity. The idea of the transformative ability of language is hardly new. According to the Greek sophist Gorgias, words artfully selected and arranged for rhetorical effect act as 'a means of fascination, peculiar psychogagia, spiritual seduction and a magical effect' (in Kisicek and Zagar 2013, p. 129).

Occult philosopher Cornelius Agrippa tells us that ‘the power of ... verses is so great, that it is believed they are able to subvert almost all nature’ (1650). Much later, Pierre Bourdieu speaks of language as a symbolic system that has ‘the power to construct reality’ (1979 p. 79), while Lakoff and Johnson identify metaphor as a linguistic form that is capable of ‘creat[ing] realities for us’ (1999 p. 146), and Norman Fairclough (1993) discusses the socially transformative aspects of words, particularly how the communicative value of language use in different types of discourse may have significant ideological effects. The use of expressions like ‘creating realities’, ‘subverting nature’ ‘spiritual seduction’ brings to mind the idea of words as magic. Thus, after exploring the ravaging despoliations of black-magical Corpspeak and Zombilingo, this essay will outline ‘countermagics’ that may enable refreshment of notions to do specifically with the field of higher education.

### **Enter the zombie**

*‘Dead but dominant’, neoliberalism may indeed have entered its zombie phase. The brain has apparently long since ceased functioning, but the limbs are still moving, and many of the defensive reflexes seem to be working too.*

*(Peck 2010, p. 109)*

In the tradition of horror literature, the zombie transgresses the boundary between the living and the dead. He or she is driven by a craving for human flesh and organs, particularly our brains. He has a ferocious will but no reason; his existence depends on the annihilation of the living who, once contaminated, become zombies themselves. In popular culture, zombie motivations are simple: to proliferate. Zombies ‘don’t even know what’s going on around them, beyond the fact that they’re hungry ... [they] are purely creatures of the id, dedicated to mindless self-gratification’ (Greene & Mohammad 2010, pp. x-xi). (For illustrative purposes, see Romero’s (1978) seminal *Dawn of the Dead*, or *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (Grahame-Smith 2009)). In one sense, zombies are similar to that other monster, the vampire. Both are parasites, but vampires are possessed of a kind of corrupt grace; they both desire and are objects of desire and most importantly, are as alive as they are dead, whereas the zombie is simply dead and visibly rotting. He has no aesthetic allure, no creative power of invention. Where some might consider the attributes of being dead, deadly dull, and dully unoriginal undesirable, they are turned to advantage through the use of Zombilingo, as will be detailed presently.

The correspondence between the colonising drive of the zombie and the zombification of social institutions has been noted by many scholars (Giroux 2011, Peck 2010, Quiggin 2012, Ryan 2012, Whelan *et al* 2013) and occurs when the machinery that enables the neoliberal growth imperative is accepted uncritically. While there are arguments that the free market is an ongoing unmitigated global success whose ‘trickle-down’ effects of wealth and bounty will eventually be felt by all,

others contend that to persist in pursuing a political direction that has failed several times over and which culminated in 2008 in a spectacular financial crisis of global proportions, might indeed be considered zombie-like. However, this is not the place to explore that debate in detail. Regardless of one's reading of economic ebbs and flows, the cultural climate in which the following discussion about words and language takes place is one in which neoliberal ideology prevails, and as a result, organisations—regardless of their social purposes—are based on corporate models. This essay argues that the lingua franca of Corpspeak and its cousin, Zombilingo, although being the languages of the dead, demonstrate a mighty ability to transform the living. So while Quiggin, Peck, and Giroux are using zombie imagery metaphorically, I'd like to go out on a limb here and suggest that the magical aspects of language are in fact, actual. By this I mean that language, or 'the power of ... verses is so great' that it enables changes in the way we *think* about any subject which in turn changes how we *act* in regard to this subject. In other words, language does more than reflect reality, it transforms it. So, although contemporary cinematic representations frequently have zombies coming into being through viral contagion or scientific accident, this essay favours the original Haitian folklore, where zombies are corpses reanimated through magic—word magic.

In large part, narratives determine attitudes towards work and work environments, as does lexical manipulation. The meaning of a word changes and therefore our attitude to the subject and the way we respond to it, changes. That is, when catch-all terms from the market are substituted for specific descriptors (for example, the 'product' for 'car', 'painting', 'health', 'film', 'tin of anchovies', 'prosthetic device', 'education', or any other object or amenity that can be sold), meaning is subordinated to market value. Such fuzzy vocabulary displaces other more precise means of expression designed for particular ideas or things, and those ideas that might have been conveyed, those stories that might have been told, are undermined. Yet, despite being moribund, zombie rhetoric and that of its close cousin, Corpspeak, are used pervasively across all human enterprises. Perhaps it is worth considering whether, if health, education, or communications for instance, were popularly conceived of (and therefore properly funded) as essential public services (with all that 'service' implies in terms of beneficence and the civic good) rather than 'industries' (with its implications of business-orientation and large-scale productivity), would they be so constrained to turn a profit for their 'stakeholders'? Might citizens—as opposed to 'consumers'—see the work done by nurses, doctors, teachers and producers of public media as having functions beyond that of producing 'product' for 'customers'?

Zombies are indiscriminate in their choice of brains to eat. However, this article focuses on their effect on education through the use of their language in universities, with a view to seeking alternative modes of expression, for as Phipps suggests, it is the role of the university 'to help us relinquish dead scripts, scripts with a death wish, and to offer alternative stories' (2010, p. 48). But alternative ways of living and of

valuing work are unlikely to be produced if institutions of learning serve to inculcate economic rationalism by compliantly framing the goals of education to conform with the growth aspirations of business by employing such usages, for instance, as 'client', 'productivity unit' and 'multi-output organisation' for 'student', 'academic', and 'university'.

Although Corpspeak and Zombilingo are closely related, there are important differences. Corpspeak consists of linguistic imports into education from the business imaginary—an 'imaginary' being either a discourse that represents current realities or a projection of 'possible worlds' (Fairclough 1993). Zombilingo, on the other hand, exports the vocabulary of critical or creative thinkers into the business realm; these are then sold back to the academy having undergone a kind of psychic surgery.

### **Zombilingo**

Zombilingo takes emotive words from humanistic lexicologies and employs them to promote and sell 'product'. It is a discursive form perfectly suited to support thanaticism, which 'subordinates the production of use values to the production of exchange value, to the point that the production of exchange value threatens to extinguish the conditions of existence of use value' (Wark 2014, np). Zombilingo continues to use terms already hopelessly enervated through overuse in the service of commercial appetites as if they still carried their original meaning. Ironically, the less evidence of 'vision', for instance, in imagining a future where values other than pecuniary or careerist ones dominate, or of the specifics of what might actually constitute 'excellence' in the context of higher education, the more frantically such notions seem to be touted—along with 'creativity', 'empowerment', 'inspiration', 'value', and dreaming.

Below are examples excerpted from the Zombilingo/English Dictionary, or ZED, which is currently in production. The dictionary contains critiques of numerous words, including those mentioned above, and demonstrates in detail how the use of equivocations, neologisms, and business-oriented rewordings are fuzzily conceived so that meaning may be evaded and criticism sidestepped. 'Transparency', for example is a Zombilingo perversion of clarity. Cris Shore makes the vital point that to resist cooperating with the requirements of 'transparency' (along with 'accountability') places one in the surreal position of seeming to argue against the traditional academic value of openness (in Lorenz 2012, p. 625). Further, who, after all, would say that they don't want to do 'excellent' work, or have no 'dreams', and do not believe in 'vision'? Who would prefer not to produce work of 'value', or be 'empowered', 'inspired', or 'creative'?

For this essay, I've highlighted just three examples of linguistic appropriation, or concept colonization by zombies that are commonly used in universities' promotional material, in curriculum design, and in

course descriptions, and so are relevant to those working as educators and academics.

### *I. Creativity*

'Creativity' is one of the most zombified of words. It is now very far removed from the sense that was once ascribed to it: a way of producing fresh ideas from an interplay of senses and intellect in the domain of imagination and intuition. For Raymond Williams, who has referred to it as 'practical imagination' (1977, p. 212) it had become a 'cant word' by the late seventies because of the range of enterprises to which it was applied (pp. 82-84). Indeed, as Alison Phipps sardonically comments, 'we are all creative now' (2010, p. 42) and this ubiquitous 'creativity' supports a form of economic fundamentalist conformity, or as Toby Miller puts it, 'the neo-liberal bequest of creativity' now supports neoliberalism (2009, p. 94). Its use in advertising, marketing, and the 'creative industries', including education, is particularly conspicuous. As Deleuze has remarked, 'advertising [is] taking over the words "concept" and "creative", and these "conceptualists" constitute an arrogant breed that reveals the activity to be capitalism's supreme thought' (in Pope 2005, p. 3).

The education 'industry' not only reflects this conformity, it buttresses and promotes it. And within higher education institutions themselves it has powerful effects, changing approaches to pedagogy and to research. Following government directives, universities may be enjoined to develop this version of 'creativity' among students, to prepare them to compete in the global 'marketplace'. In the US, Katz-Buonincontro notes Obama's appeal to develop student 'creativity' as a valuable 'asset' for job preparation and to assist in economic recovery (2012, p. 257). Australia's national cultural policy, 'Creative Australia' (2012) also proclaims that 'a creative nation is a productive nation', echoing Richard Florida's declaration that not only is 'creativity ... now the driving force of economic progress and decisive source of competitive advantage', but that 'creativity is the new economy'.

While creativity involves activities that may yield a new understanding or artifact, or even the possibility of an original thought, it is a gross misnomer to consider it simply as a 'problem solving' mechanism for increasing profit. Creative process is undermined when subjected to value judgments by growth indicators, such as those outlined in Creative Australia's tracking and targeting policy. All of these begin with the word 'growth'—of participation, of economic impact, and of value of the cultural sector as measured by a 'Statistics Working Group'.

The need for alternatives to the economic monocultural narrative is compelling at this historical juncture, where arguably the profit motive may be driving us towards possible extinction, and if not, then greater misery. This process is assisted by either careless or intentionally propagandistic linking of the word 'creative' to 'industry'. In his rebuttal of 'creative industries' puffery, Toby Miller invites us to:

come on down and take your pick of crumbling bridges, dangerous freeways, deinstitutionalized street people, inadequate schooling ... and politics run by pharmaceutical firms, health insurers, tort lawyers, finance capitalists, arms manufacturers, and gun owners all of whom make many creative inputs, I have no doubt. (2009, p. 96)

II. *Zombie mobilisation of the rhetoric of desire: passion and dreaming*

The word 'dream' is particularly useful when placed in close proximity to 'risk' and 'dare, as in the promotion of the Zell Lurie Institute for Entrepreneurial Studies, whose 'Dare to Dream' (2016) assessment grants evaluate the feasibility of business proposals. A kind of thrilling devil-may-care recklessness is implied, though as most students know the risks taken are usually confined to the frightening level of financial investment required. Thus the notion of the dream as an irrational, potent, demanding vehicle of inspiration, even containing what Ben Agger (2004, p. 135, p. 134) refers to as 'utopian reach' is replaced with the Zombilingo usage that tends to align 'dreaming' with aspirations towards visions of material success.

Melbourne University's 2007 marketing plan enjoined students to 'dream large'. By the following year, the exhortation had 'in practice come to convey irony, both to staff and students' (Coleridge 2008). Rather than broadening students' horizons, according to Coleridge, dreaming large resulted in undergraduates feeling 'academically channeled, constrained to take subjects that [did] not engage them and in reality impede'. When funds are allocated to marketing so that a university is 'seen to be' a worthy institution rather than 'being' it—by investing more in infrastructure, administration, and academic staff who can provide this service—then we have entered a dangerous fantasy wherein the appearance, fortified by inapt and grandiose language, has come to dominate the actuality.

Melbourne University's large dreams had been reduced to sizeable fantasies, and it is worth mentioning—from an economic rationalist point of view—that such fantasies are expensive. For instance, in 2011 Swinburne University's marketing budget was \$13.3 million (Hare 2012). However, this is relatively low in comparison with that of the University of Phoenix, the USA's largest for-profit university, where almost 17 out of 20 undergraduates failed to graduate within six years (Davis in Shah & Sid Nair 2013, p. 823) but where, nevertheless, US\$170,000 per day was spent in 2012 on placements on Google's search engine (Hare 2012). This raises questions as to whether that money might have been better spent on the provision of effective teaching programs and the clear articulation of the intentions of these in regularly updated university websites, which are the first port of call for prospective students—rather than sloganeering. Indeed, in an investigation of the efficacy of university marketing programs, Chrissa Favaloro (2015) found that the word of mouth from students seemed as effective as spending millions on marketing campaigns.

As with dreaming, the misuse of passion is also a literal example of the parasitism of Zombilingo. In its original form, 'passion' describes a feeling so potent as to overpower those who experience it. Yet a quick Google search using 'passion' and 'university' as keywords will produce a proliferation of 'passions' used to market university courses. In the US, Argosy University's logo features 'a flame representing passion and personal development' and on the same page, we learn that the colour symbolizes 'personal passion and wisdom' and that the university's 'passion is teaching and learning'; Aylesbury College in the UK is less ardent overall, but still has 'a passion for learning'. In Australia, Bond University does not declare a passion for learning, but it does have a 'passion for teaching'; James Cook University a 'passion for innovation and commitment to excellence'; the University of Queensland, has a 'passion for international relations', and so forth.

A word whose intention is to convey irresistible drives, the most intense feelings of love or hate, is not put to best use when ascribed to quotidian ambitions. In turn, these ambitions have their own merit and should not need to be associated with the realm of the sublime for their value to be recognised. But getting beyond any personal squeamishness brought about by this linguistic silliness and conceptual fuzziness, is a systemic problem where the zombie notion that using a word like 'passion' in relation to management consultancy will somehow make management more attractive in seeming to be a passionate enterprise. What actually occurs is that 'passion' is leached of meaning, and the courses taught are not substantively improved.

### *III. Challenge as compromise*

In the Oxford Dictionary, the word 'challenge' refers to a call 'to participate in a competitive situation'. In Zombilingo, 'challenge' replaces a variety of differently nuanced constructions from 'complexity' to 'dilemma' or 'quandary', to 'problem' or 'very real, material difficulty'. A not uncommon example of a 'challenge' in a university is the situation where student numbers exceed a lecturer's capacity to teach within his or her workload allocation. What is actually being asked is the opposite of a response to a challenge: it is compromise that is demanded. In order to teach that over-large course without exceeding the time allocation it is necessary to either, one: adjust one's work hours on paper to suit the teaching load; that is, to work more hours than can be accounted for, or two: devise teaching strategies that present an appearance of efficiency. Online activities, for example, which can indeed enhance learning may be used instead to replace individual student/teacher consultation time. But compromising the pedagogical experience in this way means, once more, that the appearance trumps the reality: the illusion of success is achieved.

The institutional consequences of meeting 'challenges' in either of these ways should be clear: a greater focus on perceived efficiencies at the expense of students' actual learning. And further plays with perception become necessary in the field of competitive global

education dominated by market forces. For instance, investments that might have been made by employing more teaching staff to enhance pedagogy (arguably a realistic response to dealing with increased student numbers), are instead channeled into the machinery of semblance-creation—marketing campaigns rife with yet more catch-phrases, or as Andrew McGettigan (2013, p. 63) mentions, in extending leisure facilities or giving a campus a face-lift so as to enhance first impressions at open days in order to attract yet more students who will find themselves in those over-large seminar groups, being taught by lecturers who have no time to engage with them individually.

Some staff do find time though, sometimes to the detriment of their personal lives or mental health, and respond to what is an institutional problem by ‘jumping through hoops’ (Tagg in Lorenz 2012, p. 620), which often results in ‘cynicism, hypocrisy, and self-exploitation’ (Lorenz 2012, p. 620). Indeed, teaching itself is increasingly monitored through surveillant processes characterised in Zombilingo as ‘transparency’. Although the notion of workers being held to account for their practices, and taking personal responsibility for their actions seems fair and equitable, many academics see the intensity of scrutiny exercised through staff assessments and reviews as managerialist intervention disruptive of the work being surveyed. Some (Evans 2004; Lorenz 2012; Phipps 2007, 2009, 2010; Taylor 2013) speak of a culture that promotes paranoia and anxiety: ‘A disabling model of accountability has emerged ... accountability is elided with policing ... it reduces professional relations to crude, quantifiable and ... “inspectable” templates ... it is introducing disciplinary mechanisms that mark a new form of coercive neo-liberal governmentality’ (Bourdieu 1979, p. 80). Yet, as Suzanne Ryan points out, ‘academics, more than other professional groups, could be expected to reflect, to take a view, and take action if necessary’ (2012, p. 3). Actions that might be taken are discussed in the section titled ‘Counter-magics’.

In sum, parasitising customary meanings assists in neutering dissent against control mechanisms used in increasing managerialist work environments. This linguistic strategy exemplifies Zombilingo’s efficiency as a system of ‘control over discursive practices [which] can be seen in terms of hegemonic struggle over orders of discourse’ (Fairclough 1993, p. 137) which shape the nature and identity of people and institutions. Giroux contends that ‘this political and moral coma allows the living dead to further experiment with those political mechanisms and social filters employed to freeze meaning, limit the discourses of freedom, and make certain ideas unspeakable, if not unthinkable’ (2011, p. 49). Or, as Miller succinctly frames it, ‘we have entered the troubling domain of the decontextualized vocabulary, where words mean everything and hence nothing’ (2009, p. 92).

In the same way that zombies eat brains, Zombilingo eats meaning: words are tormented into bonsai shapes to suit alien environments or worked until exhausted, then gutted of meaning so that what remains is a shell as hollow as an empty brain-pan. If, as Bourdieu claims, such

ideological effects become possible when a dominant culture 'conceal[s] its function of division ... under its function of communication' (1979, pp. 79-80), then domination of one group (academia) by another (economic monoculture) is certainly under way. As with the other symbolic system to be discussed in more detail below, Corpspeak, both are imposed not only as 'instrument[s] of domination', but also of 'legitimation of domination'.

### **Corpspeak (and vampirism)**

... in pursuit of spurious economic gains ... universities and their academic researchers are to surrender their critical identities in pursuit of pipe dreams such as knowledge transfer, effectiveness, targets ... (Phipps 2009, p. 6)

David Boje reflects that corporate writing 'has been imitated and celebrated by academic writers without much critical reflection on the kinds of issues it raises' (in Amernic & Craig 2006, p. 6). But the process is not one-way. A linguistic exchange has for some time been taking place between industry and higher learning institutions. 'CEOspeak', the language of leading disseminators of the broader Corpspeak, establishes a particular ideological theme, and 'sharing [such] a language provides the subtlest and most powerful of all tools for controlling the behavior of ... other persons' (Amernic & Craig 2006, p. 7). It is worth noting the use of 'sharing', as it signals collusion with corporate aims via 'a language game ... linguistic, rhetorical, perception-fashioning, and ideology-creating' (2006, p. x). In other words, in a circular fashion corporate values bleed into the academy while the academy pumps blood back into the corporates, which, figuratively speaking, echoes the scene in *Dracula* when Bram Stoker's heroine Mina is seduced by the vampire. He drinks from her veins, then enjoins her to sample his own dead blood which will enable her to take on his nature and join him in a living-dead afterlife.

Examples of everyday deployment of Corpspeak abound. For instance, 'A' is for 'Agility', which Suzanne Ryan claims is accompanied by individual withdrawal from confrontation—neither acceptance nor resistance, but a pervasive and deadening stasis—explaining to some extent the lack of organised opposition to what is perceived as an increasingly authoritarian work environment. Ryan sees this state of demoralisation as leading ultimately to 'an absence of ethos' (2012, p. 54). Then, 'B' is for 'Brand': Anthropologist Paul Manning discusses how 'brand' expresses the 'extension of corporate "control mechanisms"' rather than symbolically representing what the 'brand' actually stands for in any material sense (2010, p. 34). Thus, 'brand is often deployed as an unexamined transparent proxy for the real object of analytical interest that lies elsewhere'. Yet, in this 'era of image' (2010, p. 36) the language and imagery used in branding a university somewhat schizophrenically as both corporate and educational limits the ability of such institutions to project a particular 'personality', a form of genocide. However, I will focus on C for Consumer.

In *Keywords*, Raymond Williams notes the Latin origin of 'consume': to 'devour, waste, spend'; an early English use: to use up, as in 'consumed by fire' or by tuberculosis (consumption) which is why the phrase 'consumer society' has been used in a derogatory sense to describe a 'throw-away' culture that ensures faster production/consumption cycles. However, today, 'consumption' and 'consumer' tend to be commonplace and neutral; effectively, 'consumer' is now used to characterize the erstwhile 'citizen', or 'person'. Quite literally, this metaphor eats away at the possibility of identifying with a social role greater than that of a buyer or seller, or of contributing to the common weal by any activity outside that of an economic exchange. The division of the world into producers and consumers (as opposed to people, or citizenry, or populace) is truly terrifying as it represents the ascendancy of one function over all others—the ability to participate in a market exchange—and the absolute triumph of what Joel Mokyr terms 'homo economicus'.

In the context of education, the metaphorical formulation of students as 'consumers' of 'educational product' conceptualizes learners and teachers as participants in a broader prosperity-building exercise enacted by homo economicus, as distinct from the newer, 'homo creativus' (in Florida 2012 np). But arguably, if all of homo creativus' efforts are directed ultimately towards the goals of homo economicus, the difference between the two becomes negligible.

As Agger has pointed out, 'organised opposition against [the global evolution of capitalism] is increasingly defused by being robbed of both a viable utopian vision and a coherent language through which to organize itself and others' (1992, p. 29). Corpspeak, together with Zombilingo, is in the process of displacing thoughtful, creative, *living*, language with its own hollowly echoing verbiage and soulless simulacra. Therefore, rescripting the roles, identity and nature of education, finding 'alternative stories' about learning and teaching, and imaginatively revisioning purposes and presenting these to the public, including potential students and private funding bodies, may well be a central task of the university at the moment. And given that universities are extremely powerful institutions—which is why private firms seek to invest in them and thereby control them—it is essential to consider how this state of affairs may be altered. Thus, having discussed the condition of learning where the aims of higher education institutions are misrepresented in the languages of the living dead in order to comply with those of business, this article now enters into the zone of utopia. It will focus on the ideas of those with a will towards change. Rather than accepting TINA's rhetoric of inevitability that says There is No Alternative to free-market capitalism in all its dystopian potential, what follows is a consideration of the possibilities for other conceptions, expressions and enactments that may subvert zombie and corporate ways, all of which require the use of any *human* languages in written, spoken or visual forms.

## Countermagics

This essay has emphasized the transformative power of language. The term 'transformation' is part of the lexicology of magic, which is commonly held to be the ability to stimulate change in objects or events by mysterious, hidden means; that is, 'occult'. The occult means with which this essay is concerned are hidden in the light, in everyday turns of phrase that affect daily life, and their transformative capability is all the more powerful because of this. The conferral of the qualifier 'black' or 'white' indicates the intention of that word magic: to clarify or to confuse. So far, I have focused on the black-magical languages of Zombilingo and Corpspeak, so now I would like to consider the possibilities for white magic.

### *i. Fantasy and counterfantasy*

Reality might not be a fixture—crudely, inescapably there—but a continuing, spontaneous enterprise of the imagination. (Clarke 1989)

The fantastic is commonly thought of as being separate from the real world. Yet the real world is riddled with fantastical projections. As already demonstrated, even if zombies and vampires do not exist in corporeal reality, they are still highly effective. An example of neoliberal fantastical wishful thinking mentioned by Quiggin is that 'financial markets make the best possible use of economic information'. Yet, the Global Financial Crisis was able to occur when 'tens of trillions of dollars of interlinked obligations were built on a foundation of speculative ... investments' (2012, pp. 1-2). Economic speculation relies heavily upon conjecture, perception, interpretations of the zeitgeist, projections and prognostications. Authors of fantasy and science fiction use cultural or societal analyses in order to construct plausible fictive realities in a similar process. They refer to this as 'world building', which is precisely the activity of the neoliberal fantasist. In both cases similar tactics are employed to build a story. Lexical constructions assist in projects that might be described as building castles in the air. Not so long ago a castle collapsed with the GFC, and many people lost their savings to this neoliberal tale. Yet the narrative still endures: 'The living dead of the free-market revolution continue to walk the earth, though with each resurrection their decidedly uncoordinated gait becomes even more erratic' (Peck 2010, p 109).

In politics, as in theatre and literature, the power of fantastical image-making has long been exploited by propagandists. Soviet art glorified a heroic proletariat participating joyfully in a revolution that bore little resemblance to the quotidian reality of their lives. Fairclough refers to the highly managed Nazi rallies as the first example of what he calls 'aestheticisation'—a way of managing appearances (2004, p. 183). Paraphrasing Walter Lippman, Stephen Duncombe points out that 'citizens - as humans - act upon evocative symbols, evaluate according to feelings, consult their desires, and vote to fulfill their fantasies.

Leaders who realize this can control democracy through the "manufacture of consent" (2006, p. 13).

Constitutive images and words might be also applied in the manufacture of political *dissent*—as suggested by Duncombe—by 'build[ing] a politics that embraces the dreams of people ... a politics that understands desire and speaks to the irrational ... a politics that tells good stories' (2006, p. 9). Duncombe insists that whether or not one endorses it, a love of spectacle characterises this historical time and argues that 'if we want our ideas to lead ... then we need to learn how to ... communicate in today's spectacular vernacular' (2006, p. 9). Perhaps this approach might be used to assist those working in higher education. Although academics are justifiably suspicious of spectacle and its appeals to emotion, perhaps such means should not be shunned by those whose persuasive tactics traditionally favour rationality. One might argue that display and playfulness could be used as 'countermagics' against the effects of Corpsspeak.

Revelation of untruth, unmasking of misinformation, lies, propaganda, and imperial nudity through neutral, critical argument is no longer enough in itself. One might argue that maintaining the dichotomous relationship between truth/good/rationality in opposition to falsehood/evil/emotionality and refusing to play with irrationality, actually contributes to the predicament facing higher education today. Although the critical paradigm is certainly essential to scholarly endeavour, to suborn emotional responses and playfulness to skeptical intelligence is not only to limit possibilities of expression available to writers and teachers, but also to leave the field open to neoliberal storytellers who do not suffer from this squeamishness, but happily tell tales of a glowing future advertised by carefully crafted images. Zombilingo mobilises emotive language appropriated from the arts and Corpsspeak both manipulates language appropriated from the arts and deploys cool econometric rationality, citing irresistible global forces, the need to expand markets, to standardize and streamline in order to ensure full advantage is taken so that universities may best act out their 'strategic role as the driving force of knowledge innovation'.

That said, although corporate imagery is abundantly deployed, the same tired catchphrases are trotted out again and again, as listed in the ZED. On page five of Macquarie University's 'Strategic Research Framework', 2015–2024 'strategic' is used five times, and throughout we are repeatedly assured that Macquarie is a world-class institution attracting world-class researchers with world-class disciplinary strengths providing world-class support. Similarly, the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, as Downes (2008) observes, managed to employ all the clichés in just three pages: "international university", "global passport", "international best practice", "place on the world stage" ... "across the globe", "global university" ... "international network" ...' and so forth. The tedium of corporate repetition ought to be something that writers, thinkers, and teachers might use to their advantage. Given the linguistic and intellectual talents of many

academics, these might be arrayed not only to ridicule the opposition, but to retell in other terms, other phrases, using lively and fresh rhetoric, of the activities, aspirations, and values of higher education as they see them.

Yet many academics feel constrained to act. Suzanne Ryan (2012, p. 4) looks at the Australian example where massification (beginning in the 1980s), marketization (since the 1990s), corporatisation (speeding up in the early 2000s), managerialism (since the mid-2000s) and most recently, a 'second generation' of Excellence in Research Australia (ERA) has resulted in ever-increasing bureaucratization and concomitant fear for one's position and a general disenchantment. She claims this has led to a 'zombification' of academics themselves. But an alternative to the common reaction of 'individual withdrawal' lies in reacting with words fuelled by indignation or a sense of the absurd. These more subversive tactics of ridicule and ghetto humour might be used with a third grouping of counter-magics to oppose the Long March of neoliberalism.

ii. *Ongoing criticism of neoliberal assumptions assisted by irony and ridicule*

Evans rightly criticizes the continual reiteration of 'neo-liberal discourses about the merit of "competition" and the value of private rather than public institutions' (2014, p.18). This narrative buttresses the central argument for remodeling traditional public universities in the image of a private business: competition promotes growth and therefore it is a virtue and beneficial for any institutions that encourage it—regardless of the nature and purpose of that institution. A lack of competition is presented as encouraging complacency. However, other voices highlight the error at the root of the assumption of the inferiority of public institutions (conservative, unimaginative, unwieldy, or as economist Mazzucato phrases it, 'the state as this Leviathan ... this monster with big tentacles' (2013, np) before private (vibrant, experimental, 'dynamic', 'creative', 'innovative'). After describing how the privatization project is supported by 'the narrative, the discourse, the images, the actual words' used, Mazzucato points out that despite the grandiose claims and the rhetoric, innovations such as the iPhone, the internet, Facebook and GPS were in fact government funded at the outset, often through grants to public universities. Research conducted by Rhoads indicates that the quality of education has been found to be problematic in profit-seeking universities (2006, pp. 13-15) and Shah and Sid Nair clearly outline the many failures of profit-oriented educational institutions in Asia, Europe, the UK, the US and, specifically regarding 'institutional governance; a compliance-led quality culture' in Australia (2013, pp. 823-825). Others working within universities including Fairclough, Giroux, Lorenz, Marginson, Miller, Phipps, Ryan, Taylor, Whelan et al. are powerful critics, yet as Evans insists, yet more is needed when ideological rhetoric continues to defeat reasoned arguments supported by reliable evidence, 'trapp[ing] universities] in a neoliberal education environment' (King 2012, p. 2), their employees

suffering from a sense of 'exile'. As Phipps notes, there are limits to how the critical paradigm can help us in imagining alternative directions for higher education (2010, p. 44). Therefore, if intelligent criticism and inquiry alone are insufficient to the task of recovering academics from exile and altering the direction of the zombie march, other methods might also be deployed.

Harry G Frankfurt's essay, *On Bullshit*, became popular not only with other academics but also students, with its discussion on the difference between overt lies and more insidiously duplicitous language: "The bullshitter ... does not reject the authority of the truth, as the liar does ... He pays no attention to it at all. By virtue of this, bullshit is a greater enemy of the truth than lies are'. *On Bullshit* also received considerable attention in the public arena (in the *New York Times* and on *60 Minutes*) when it was republished in hard cover, although as David Kellogg points out in his review, Frankfurt missed an opportunity when he failed to develop the potential of bullshit as a rhetorical tactic (2006, p. 553).

Chris Lorenz also uses evidence-based research along with sardonicism. His caustic response to managerialism includes explaining precisely why it is a 'bullshit discourse' by attacking the vocabulary of managerialist terms such as efficiency, quality, accountability, transparency, and flexibility, and with loaded irony, noting similarities between state Communism and New Public Management (2012). Other academics are also practicing strategies involving humour and ridicule and in particular, parody as what are termed 'countermagics' in this article. Indeed, if one considers that although the profit-oriented, expansionist languages of Corpspeak and Zombilingo are the preferred idioms of the colonisers, they are relatively youthful languages, and thus vulnerable to ridicule. One might write a 'Portrait of the Corpspeaker as a Young Tyrant', for although vigorous, these young languages also exhibit certain weaknesses of the youthful sociopathic bully—self-interest, narcissism and vanity—attributes also quite funny in their awkwardness. One might emphasise their absurdity by parodying their reliance on hollow and repetitive sloganeering. Rather than slavishly imitating this idiom, we might laugh at it, and encourage our colleagues and students to do the same.

Richard Hil (2012) too uses humour. He has provided a list of resistance measures against corporate aims that include: disrupting the process of meetings by contesting received ideas; asking full fee-paying students if they would like a mark or receipt when returning essays; suggesting that academics continually add to and subtract from workload documents so as to 'exhaust the apparatchiks', or 'appear[ing] busy by ruffling your hair, walking speedily through corridors and gasping for breath'; starting an Academic Survivor of Workload Formulae support-group and ask for assistance from university counsellors; agitating for self-reviews; joining the Slow movement.

iii. *Allying actual creativity and imagination with 'utopian reach' and action*

For Raymond Williams,

Creative practice is ... already, and actively, our practical consciousness. When it becomes struggle ... it can take many forms. It can be the long and difficult remaking of an inherited (determined) practical consciousness: a process often described as development but in practice a struggle at the roots of the mind ... confronting a hegemony in the fibres of the self and in the hard practical substance of effective and continuing relationships. It [...involves...] the articulation and formation of latent, momentary, and newly possible consciousness (1977 p. 212).

Williams' notion of creativity sits uneasily with previously cited proclamations that 'a creative nation is a productive nation', or Florida's 'creativity' as a 'driving force of competitive advantage'. Further, Williams' articulation demands that the word, 'creativity' should be treated with suspicion when used to assist the incursion of the living dead into contexts where it has no business, regardless of its business interests. Actual creativity has nothing to do with the dullness of mind represented by clichéd and self-seeking sleight of mind designed to obscure rather than elucidate (i.e. Corpspeak). The opposite of creative vision is totalitarian narrowness: constraining, limited by short-sighted goals, dead-ended, and commonly expressed in simplistic and vague terms (Zombilingo).

Imagination may be seen almost as the opposite of fantasy. Iris Murdoch claimed that fantasies are egotistical and untruthful fictions that are confined within already existing consciousness. Imagination, in contrast, feeds creative activity, and although 'creativity' and 'imagination' become platitudinous humbug in Zombilingo, they may yet be reclaimed. Creativity needs to be seen again as the exercise of our 'practical consciousness', and as Giroux insists, we must, 'take seriously Meaghan Morris' argument that "things are too urgent now to be giving up on our imagination" (2002, p. 457). Or, more specifically, to take up the challenge of Jacques Derrida's provocation that "we must do and think the impossible. If only the possible happened, nothing more would happen. If I only did what I can do, I wouldn't do anything" (Giroux 2002, p. 457).

Ronald Barnett asks the question, 'how might [imagination] be brought into play in order to address problems currently facing the university?' (2013 p. 5). He suggests other possibilities including 'feasible utopias', while Giroux (2013) calls for the mobilization of a radical imagination against what he calls 'the politics of disimagination'. This phrase refers to discourses as well as other forms of representation that undermine the capacity of individuals 'to bear witness to a different and critical sense of remembering, agency, ethics, and collective resistance' (Giroux, 2013 np). Fairclough's 'aestheticisation' through appearance management may be related to a form of disimagination. Not only is

appearance management used to construct seductive political messages, but it also emerges when the act of being *seen* to be or do something is overvalued. This sensibility is reflected in such common colloquial turns of phrase as ‘we need to be seen to ...’ or ‘we need to change the perception that ...’. Rather than actually *doing*, actually *changing*, the simulacrum is substituted for the real—as in universities’ tendency to revamp its image through rebranding initiatives, or as noted by Marginson (2014) to attempt to seduce custom through marketing strategies rather than acting on improving learning by, for instance, reducing class sizes. A focus on appearance as if it owns greater value than reality allows the perception to trump the issue, allowing truthless fantasy to take over.

Written language may, in fact, promote inaction. Within higher education, academics may fail to act, though for different reasons, including fear for their (often precarious) jobs, or a habit of reflection and writing rather than action, so that although they may desire to move towards some kind of change, verbalisation may actually replace activity. As Phipps observes, academics may criticise some injustice occurring in the world, but then fail to ‘try, through stumbling and error, to engage in the actual activities which would count as critical action’ (2010 p. 44). Utopian projections have to be extended into action if they are to function as our ‘applied imagination’.

According to Richard Kearney, the imagination also owns an ethical role: it is through everyday imaginative projections that we create a ‘liveable world’ (2008 pp. 36-37). Kearney cites Patocka’s claim that ‘the ethical imagination ... is a matter of spiritual struggle which refuses the tyranny of things *as they are* out of commitment to the Idea that things *can be other than they are*’ (2008 p. 42). Imagination is an essential and formidable force to deploy when challenging the fantasies upon which world-shaping social, economic or political ideologies are constructed.

iv. *Speaking and writing in languages that tell another story*

*The world changes according to the way people see it, and if you alter even by a millimeter the way people look at reality, then you can change it.*

*(James Baldwin in Giroux 2013)*

Language as a social practice is indeed a ‘mode of action’ (Austin and Levinson in Fairclough 1993 p. 134) in that it affects change in the world. Mary Evans insists that ‘an initial resistance ... could be a refusal of the language now inflicted upon university staff. Out would go consumers, mission statements, aims and objectives and all the widely loathed, and derided vocabulary of the contemporary university’ (Evans cited in Phipps, 2009 p. 6). Out would go absurdities like university ‘brand guidelines’ which prescribe standardisation while simultaneously claiming to ‘challenge convention’. While it may be true

that language can never be entirely without semantic slippage, Zombilingo and Corpspeak are particularly misleading and fraudulent. As practised writers and teachers, academics might choose modes of expression that are as clear as we can make them, and which are driven by the intention to communicate rather than obfuscate, a mode of discourse that Alison Phipps refers to simply as 'the language of learning'.

Simon Marginson, too, insists that it is neither through profit-based entrepreneurship, nor through demonstrations of 'efficiency' or 'transparent accountability' that public universities will gain public support, but through 'the conduct of activities that are unique to universities and enable their distinctive social contributions' (2007 p. 126). And such conduct requires terms of reference appropriate to the field of education. Further, if one values *any* social or cultural concern beyond its pecuniary worth, then it is important to recognize points of difference and acknowledge them through the way they are articulated, using language that reflects the aims, philosophy, intention, function and identity of each activity.

Speaking and writing in 'the language of learning' is becoming more difficult, however, for as Phipps has mentioned, many academics now live in exile from that language. Along with Evans and Marginson, she contends that academics must insist on their own 'critical, creative' practices and challenges those who work in the arts and the humanities to, 'Help us tackle the discursive violence and the common-sense assumptions that are inherent ... in what Bourdieu and Wacquant (2001) called 'NewLiberalSpeak' (2010 pp. 48-49). 'We of all people can do better things with language than [accept] the saturation of arts and humanities with violent management discourses' (Phipps, 2009 p. 6). A very simple example would be eschewing the term 'consume' for particular verbs that relate to particular fields, rather than falling back on generalities. An action towards revivifying writing would involve eschewing any formulaic textual shapes, for these are creatively stifling.

## Conclusion

*Language is the most profound feature of any place.*

*(Hustvedt 2006)*

This essay has looked at the effects of a kind of fundamentalist econocultural vision of universities, referring to images from magical lexicologies and folklore to characterise the depredations of Zombilingo and Corpspeak. Throughout it has been my intention, following Giroux, to argue against the 'market discipline [that] now regulates all aspects of social life and the regressive economic rationality that drives it [and] sacrifices the public good, public values, and social responsibility to a tawdry consumerist dream' (2013 np). As vehicles of communication, Corpspeak and Zombilingo are effective and affective agents of social, cultural, and moral change, corroding the grammar and vocabulary of

teaching, learning, and research to serve the interests of a living dead ideology. The linguistic environment that enables ever-increasing marketisation and corporatization of higher learning has been considered, and how this interferes with academics' ability to fulfill pedagogical and social responsibilities. Ways in which universities might deviate from the path that follows a moribund model in the interests of short-term profit have been suggested, considering alternative possibilities for vitality and liveliness in expression of educational goals, that might enable a happier future for higher education and support its role of contributing to the development of healthily functioning societies.

Indeed, Fairclough (1993 p. 133) claims that it is a social and moral *imperative* to reflect upon 'critical, social and historical orientation to language and discourse', and may well be the 'remedial' starting point for dealing with perceptual disjunctions (*italics mine*). We might then extend the argument beyond the gates of learning institutions and come to see ourselves less as 'consumers' (with its implications of a rather passive grazing animal) and instead as 'citizens' (actively engaged social participants), in a 'society' rather than a 'marketplace'. As other authors cited herein most eloquently insist, it is through critical thought allied not only with critical action, but with storytelling flair, ironic humour, and an understanding of the meaning and roles of true creativity and imagination that we might revision the place and nature of higher education within the greater community.

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