The living dead and the dead living: contagion and complicity in contemporary universities


Abstract

In this chapter, we examine the current state of professional academic freedom and research in terms of what we see as the zombification of the academy. We argue that neoliberal reforms to the academy have created a research culture that treats academics as non-thinking entities (the living dead), who feel they have limited control over their research and funding amidst a pervasive and contagious audit culture. But whilst these reforms may be experienced by academics as an externally introduced form of control that saps or sucks the 'life' out of research activity, the proliferation of neoliberal reforms is only enabled through the complicit reproduction of an audit culture by academics themselves. In this sense, academics (as the dead living) also contribute, in ambivalent and contradictory ways, to the zombification of the academy.