

## VAMPIRE CAPITALISM: THE TROPE THAT HAS FOUND ITS TIME

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**Abstract:** There is no past in the history of ideas, but intellectual history reveals gaps, silences, and marginalization. Powerful tropes can be buried by scholarly shortcuts, academic fashions, and citation politics. Ten years ago, Paul Kennedy published a book titled *Vampire Capitalism*. Since it was published, it has received 45 citations. From this foundational impact, it has now found its moment of resonance, applicability and value. From the Epstein files to recurrent wars, from xenophobic invasions of cities to irrational and ephemeral decisions about Generative AI governance, scholars and citizens require a theoretical frame to understand this moment of oppression, abuse, and insularity. This theoretical article excavates Vampire Capitalism from the scholarly coffin to reveal the consequences of the collective thrall, and how to – perhaps – awaken the body politic. The main focus of this article is to move Vampire Capitalism from its reformist origins in cosmopolitan sociology and reneest it in Claustropolitanism. This theory for the end of the world offers a way of thinking about fear, xenophobia, compression, deaths of despair and a (post) work era fuelled by a techbrologarchy. As life and living is outsourced to neoliberal-framed technologies, (metaphoric) vampires feed on a citizenship under the thrall of consumerism. By returning to the key moment of this transition from cosmopolitanism to Claustropolitanism – the Global Financial Crisis – my article demonstrates that it is too late for reformism. Citizens are voting against their interests to address the imaginary threats of race, gender, and sexuality. Vampire Capitalism feeds on these invented traditions of difference, fear and xenophobia. Instead, it is time for what Marx and Engels described as a ‘sober sense’ to see reality, rather than floating in fear through a cascading simulacrum. This article, in form and content, reveals the capacity for a Claustropolitan Cultural Studies.

**Keywords:** Claustropolitan cultural studies; claustropolitanism; cosmopolitan sociology; Paul Kennedy; techbrologarchy; Vampire Capitalism

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## 1. Introduction

Metaphors from science fiction and fantasy have been appropriated to activate an array of theoretical interventions and thought experiments. *Star Trek* (Hassler-Forest, 2016) and *Star Wars* (Reed, 2023), *Game of Thrones* (Brabazon, 2016a), and *Lord of the Rings* (Birge, 2025) offer vocabulary, shapes and structures to trial new ways of thinking and knowing. Through this crowded popular cultural landscape of Jedi and Vulcans, Iron Thrones and rings, the undead remain a constant source of creativity and innovation.

The undead are a strange, if mythical, sociological grouping of beings that are no longer living, but behave as if they are alive. They span from ghosts and mummies to zombies and vampires. This undead collective is used metaphorically and theoretically to probe the nature of life and, indeed, living. Zombie Concepts and Zombie Categories were first used by Ulrich Beck in 2001 (Beck, 2001). They were part of Beck's cosmopolitan sociological paradigm that was both globalizing and multicultural. Jonathan Rutherford, in an interview with Beck, described this term as a combination of "sociology and horror" (2000, p. 37). Through this disclosure, Rutherford probed their relationship.

JR: Zombies are the living dead. Do you mean that these institutions are simply husks that people have abandoned?

UB: I think people are more aware of the new realities than the institutions are. But at the same time, if you look at the findings of empirical research, family is still extremely valued in a very classical sense. Sure there are huge problems in family life, but each person thinks that he or she will solve all those problems that their parents didn't get right (2000, p. 38).

The optimism of Beck's cosmopolitan sociological project is revealed here. Families are flawed, but still useful. The "cosmopolitan perspective" included "the otherness of the other" (2002, p. 18). Still, in the midst of this cultural optimism, he argued that particular concepts - family, nation, work, leisure, home, woman, man, trust, and authenticity - are still circulating in our lexicon. These words are deployed in daily life, and for safety and comfort, we pretend we know and agree on their meaning. But they are zombie concepts. What this means is that these concepts – like nation and family – walk around in our language and society like zombies. They occupy the form of human words, but they are emptied of content. These word husks carry replaced, toxic ideas. Talk about family or work continues, but the concepts have been emptied and refilled with toxic content that kills meaning, expectations, planning and the future. Brains have been eaten. Put another way, signifiers and signifieds have been unhooked. Codes and ideologies are not functioning to build an acceptable or consensual interpretation of the world (Brabazon, 2016b). Like a zombie, the concepts follow us around pretending to be benign, and they kill us, even metaphorically.

Ulrich Beck slotted the zombie category, that became the zombie concept, into his cosmopolitan sociology toolbox. The project of this article is to reframe these concepts that commenced in cosmopolitan sociology for claustropolitanism (Brabazon, 2022a). Claustropolitanism term activates a theory for understanding the end of the world. Capturing foreclosure, exterminism, (post)expertise, pandemics and the decline of the public good, claustropolitanism is a state or tendency (Williams, 1986) that exists on the edge and in the margins. In making the end of the world great again, claustropolitanism is a theory to understand xenophobia, racism, and the arbitrary and irrational application of injustice. The normalization of greed, exploitation, and excess remains, even after the Global Financial Crisis (Tett, 2009), and continues to infect both individuals and institutions.

As applied in this article, claustropolitanism is a theoretical and paradigmatic of revisioning and recalibration. Instead of zombies, this article awakens another imagining of the undead. Following on from Hudson, vampires are also used as a strategy of world-making through social theory (2021). Similar to zombies and available for adaptations and reimaginings, the destruction and chaos of our present can be framed and interpreted through Vampire Capitalism, to create understanding from irrationality, and sense-making from the chaos. Put another way, there is a singular question explored in this paper: why are neoliberal economic and social systems being supported that result in war, poverty, ignorance and exploitation? To answer this question, a theoretical project from ten years ago is reclaimed, reframed and reorganized to end the thrall and build consciousness.

Vampire, as a noun, is added to an array of contexts, objects, and situations, often forming a compound noun. Vampire Capitalism, as one example, has a distinctive origin story. This phrase reached its peak of theorization through Paul Kennedy and his published monograph with that title in 2016 (Kennedy, 2016). It attracted some citations, particularly during the year of the COVID-19 pandemic (Porter, 2020; Soborski, 2021), but re-reading it now, this is a theory that has found its time. A moment. Very often, theory and theorists are ahead – way ahead - of their context. Theory is a pebble that theorists throw into the lake. It works ahead of consensus, commonsense and the mainstream. Some theories are out of phase and place at the moment when an innovative scholar stretches their mind and builds an argument no one has seen. It is written. It is published. It has some value. But later, sometimes much later, it clicks into a meaning system that matters. Vampire Capitalism is a term to diagnose this instability. It is the moment to hook this concept into a different context. To bring the trope forward in time, it must first agitate and pulse in its past.

## 2. Here comes the vampire

Vampires have a long history, centuries before the publication of *Dracula*. It is an international history that dialogues with the history of ideas. In 2024, Simon Bacon edited *The Palgrave Handbook of the Vampire* (2024). Spanning over 1700 pages and 98 chapters, entire sections were devoted to European Vampires, Vampires from Asia, Vampires of the Americas, and a focus on the Middle East, Africa, and Australasia. Besides the geographical coverage, there was attention to identity politics, fandom, and folklore. What this extraordinary *Handbook* confirms is that most storytelling traditions have characters or archetypes that journey and function between life and death, provoking questions about the afterlife, or – indeed – what is after life?

Simon Bacon revealed that vampires often narrativize and shape the interpretations of unexplained deaths or diseases, while remaining a troubled and troubling description of foreigners, strangers, or new people in a community (2023). The metaphor activates claustropolitan tendencies. These people are degraded as vampires. They are dangerous. Labelled. Marginalized. Foreigners are vampires. They suck at the living. They remove life, livelihoods and value from citizens.

Vampires hook into the fears, paranoia, and xenophobia of an era. But they are also complicated, and complicating. They agitate the simple binary oppositions that organize daily life: living / dying, citizen / stranger, safety / danger, and beauty / ugliness. They reveal the porous boundaries of heteronormality and challenge ‘normal’ sexuality (Schaffer, 1994). Swirling and churning these categories of life, love, work, play, and intimacy, the undead agitate and confuse truth and untruth, falsity and possibility.

While acknowledging the long and international history of the vampire and the undead that walk amongst the living, the specific significance of *Dracula* in unpopular and popular cultures is difficult to overestimate. *Dracula* reshapes the vampire narrative (Stoker, 1997). Awakened in the Carpathian Mountains, Bram Stoker's novel has not only built the goth subculture and Goth(ic) Studies (Martin, 2002; Botting, 2007; Gunn and Schilt, 2007; Spracklen and Spracklen, 2018), but provided an effective income source for Whitby tourism (Reijnders, 2011; Bevan, 2024). The undead are, indeed, big business.

*Dracula* was an important book, summoning the energy of the Fin de siècle and introducing one of the most important characters in popular cultural history. Published in 1897, it is a truly innovative piece of literature, challenging the structural assumptions of fiction. The original title was *The Undead*, not *Dracula*, and there is a reason for this prescient title and different focus. The (now) title character is never centred in the narrative. The prose is organized around diaries and letters from other characters. The point of view moves. Wildly. Newcomb argues that this mode of storytelling shakes consensus and breaks notions of the status quo, particularly regarding faith and reason (2011). An epistolary novel is a rare mode and genre of literary construction, particularly outside of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Derived from the Greek – Epistle – meaning letter, it is also used in Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (2015), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (2021), and Stephen King's *Carrie* (1974). All remain in print and question the fabric of reality because there is no traditional narrator or single viewpoint. In *Dracula*, each character tells a part of the story, and there is no expansive truth to be discovered through an omniscient narrator. Dan Brand described it as “literary striptease” (2022, 17). Readers see fragments, shapes, and shadows.

*Dracula* is a brilliant, disturbing, and unstable book in terms of its form. Yet this innovation in form builds complexity through content. From this intricacy and difference, the character of the title built a legend. It is an important archetype and arc to show how often popular culture begins in unpopular culture. *Dracula* was not Stoker's best-selling book in his lifetime. His book on Henry Irving was the success story during his life (2022), but was reduced to the “forgotten writings” by the early 2010s (Stoker, 2012). From this origin in unpopularity, the scope and scale of the character's popularity are difficult to fathom. *Dracula* is second only to Sherlock Holmes as the most filmed character in history (Waltje, 2000). Universal Studios released six films, starting with *Dracula* in 1931, but progressing to *Dracula's Daughter*, *Son of Dracula*, *House of Frankenstein*, *House of Dracula*, and – memorably – *Abbot and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (Neibaur, 2017). Then moving to Hammer Horror, Hammer Studios made sixteen vampire films between 1958-1974 (Frayling, 2011). Anne Rice wrote fifteen vampire novels (Nussbaumer, 2014). The Count remains ever-present on Sesame Street (Cole, Richman and Brown, 2014), and Grandpa in the Munsters offers a comedic turn on the narrative (Bringle, 2011).

There are many reasons for this recurrent reimagining and revisioning. Potent and powerful binary oppositions are problematized through *Dracula*, and vampires more generally, spanning from good to evil, religion to sacrilege, modernity to tradition, sanity to madness, and civilization to primal forces. In the novel, Van Helsing suggests *Dracula* is a graduate of Scholomance, the Academy of Magic, located deep in the earth and run by the devil. The capacity to challenge what Essaka Joshua listed as “normalcy, deviance, and abjection” (2026, 13), ensures that *Dracula* and the wider “Gothic imagination” (Joshua, 2026, 1), summons the storms, fog and mist to raise a taxonomy of mental and physical harms, mad scientists and deformed monsters. The goal of such a taxonomy is to demonstrate that the monsters are not monstrous, and that rational scientists reveal the insanity of their wider society.

Stoker's *Dracula* is a rich database that has been accessed since its publication. Still, some characteristics remain from the archetype. The vampire lives indefinitely, regenerates by drinking blood, casts no shadow, cannot be seen in a mirror, shapeshifts into other creatures, most frequently a bat, maintains telepathic control over animals and humans, possesses great speed and physical agility, and requires an invitation to enter a house. While these characteristics and attributes are reasonably fixed, vampires, as they move through literary genres and popular culture, walk between life and death, and they suck the social anxieties of their time, and our own. The next stage of this paper demonstrates what happens with intellectual history mashes with vampiric storytelling.

### 3. Vampire Capitalism

It is inspiring as a reader and scholar to see an intellectual develop a research project and publication that intervenes in the fabric of politics, culture, and society. When Paul Kennedy published the book *Vampire Capitalism: fractured societies and alternative futures* in 2016, he was not to know the accuracy of his theoretical projections and trajectories. It took a decade, but his monograph found its time. The book was written while he was a Visiting Research Fellow at Manchester Metropolitan University, an institution with a history in popular culture through the Manchester Institute for Popular Culture (Brabazon and Redhead, 2022). Throughout his career, he taught and wrote widely on comparative modernization, green businesses, globalization and cosmopolitanism. Setting up the Global Studies Association in the UK in 2000, Kennedy was known for his career and field-building textbook, *Global Sociology* (Cohen and Kennedy, 2017). He was one of the key scholars of globalization (2020a), and probed different modes of international economic organization. He was best known throughout his career for his research on work, migration, mobility and mobility studies, sustainable businesses, and cosmopolitanism. As I will argue in this article, his research now translates – effectively and powerfully – from cosmopolitan sociology and into claustropolitanism, particularly as he investigated hyper-consumerist culture and what he then described as predatory capitalism (Kennedy, 2020b).

Poignantly and tragically, Kennedy was not alive to witness this revisioning of his research and how it clicks into the second Trump Presidency. In April 2020, he died of pancreatic cancer, which was only diagnosed in December 2019 (Kennedy, 2020). With a gothic power, his book *Vampire Capitalism* continues his presence, beyond the grave. *Vampire Capitalism* was written before the pandemic, yet it explained the pandemic. It was written before the techbrologarchy and the rise of the alt-right, or the Trump-fuelled zombie apocalypse. The reason Kennedy – ten years ago – was so right was because he recognized the shared origin, and the shared forgetting of this irrationality and systemic confusion.

The Global Financial Crisis in 2008-9 changed the world – and in many ways – destroyed the world. Greedy, ruthless, self-absorbed individuals bet other people's money and brought down the global financial system. But instead of allowing those banks and hedge funds to fail and those individuals to be destroyed by their catastrophic decisions, governments around the world bailed out the banks because, to activate the cliché of the time, 'they were too big to fail.' Public money not only subsidized private greed, but paid the bills when it went wrong (Tett, 2009). Without regulation of the banks – even after this disaster – the banking sector, and finance capitalism more generally, continued this irrational chaos, continued to pay bonuses to executives, and allowed greed and individual hyper-wealth to be the fuel for their engine.

The problem was that the national governments that bailed out these banks used public money to do so, thereby cutting into the capacity and potential for public health, public education, public universities, and public libraries. Public money was used to bail out private firms. Kennedy's interpretation of this time – eight years later – was profound.

Anxious voices now seriously question whether an apparently unaccountable corporate capitalism allied to a scientific and technological juggernaut must be reined in (2016, p. 1).

That serious question has a serious answer. It is too late now. Corporate capitalism has fused with the scientific and technological juggernaut. Therefore, the rest of humanity - outside of 0.001% of the population are simply a food source. They exist to be exploited.

The alignment of right wing libertarianism, Silicon Valley-inspired high tech venture capitalism, and excessive capitalism has been compressed into the inelegant portmanteau of our time: “techbrologarchy” (Boucher and McAvan, 2026; Norden and Weiner, 2025). Minimal governmental regulation and maximal privatization build into what Boucher and McAvan described as “right wing accelerationist tendencies (2026, 2). This oligarchy of technologically connected ‘brothers’ summons a Nietzschean shaping of a social future built on “a dying democracy” (Smith-Carrier, Paul and de Freitas Boullosa, 2025).

Instead of building and disseminating consciousness and resistance about the consequences of the now empowered techbrologarchy damaging international safety nets and guardrails, the retreat was to angry, insular and self-absorbed nationalism. MAGA and Brexit are two archetypes. The Reform Party and One Nation are two more exemplars. Disempowered citizens voted against their own interests (Brabazon, Redhead, Chivaura, 2018), granting government to political parties and organizations that continue to reduce regulation and public services. Instead of recognizing international injustices and building alliances and allegiances, bizarre nationalist barriers to consciousness and community were created, such as through the Canadian Freedom Convoy (Hunt, 2025) and the ‘occupation’ of Wellington in New Zealand through an array of (post)pandemic grievances (Brabazon, 2022b).

Progressivist and revolutionary movements are founded on disempowered people and communities finally gaining consciousness of collective inequalities and strategies for collective struggle. Marx and Engels, in *The Communist Manifesto*, described the peak moment of the exploitation of workers.

All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober sense his real condition in life (1967).

While these flourishing inversions have inspired generations of theorists, our current moment has shown that Marx and Engels were wrong. No ‘sober sense’ has emerged. Indeed, metaphoric and actual filters block the seeing of reality. The mirror is denied, displaced, and hidden. Through an influencer culture and a dopamine economy, this last compulsion to face reality never occurs.

What is horrific about these structural transformations in finance capitalism is the active forgetting of the Global Financial Crisis and the consequences of the public bailout. No ‘sober sense’ has emerged. Within a year, these businesses that were ‘too big to fail’ were continuing with business as usual. Austerity policies flooded the rest of the economy to pay for their ‘normality’ (Flynn and Fonseca, 2023). There was an active forgetting by citizens around the world that these people destroyed structures of public care, respect and education. The consequence of this active forgetting is that when a crisis appeared, national governments, which had depleted their public services, would be unprepared. Cue COVID-19. The

depleted public health systems could not manage a crisis of this scale. Because of COVID, international students stopped enrolling in public universities, revealing how they subsidized entire national systems of higher education (Weber, Van Mol and Wolbers, 2024). Xenophobia and nationalism masked this reality, demonizing ‘foreign’ students (Brabazon, 2022a).

This is the interwoven story of greed, under-regulation, public subsidies of private institutions and public underfunding. Kennedy predicted this trajectory so effectively, before his death, because he located the crucial origin story: the Global Financial Crisis and the active forgetting of its costs and its consequences. Governments cared for capital, not citizens, justifying that this focus enables economic growth. Metaphoric and actual blood was extracted from living beings.

This is Vampire Capitalism. The dead sucking the blood from the living, so they can remain alive. No personal responsibility. No guilt. No shame. For Kennedy, the vampire metaphor was used to demonstrate that sinister, evil, profit-hungry capitalists were draining the life force from human society. Kennedy was subtle. He recognized that there are multiple capitalisms. Vampire capitalism is the version that only takes – sucks – and returns nothing. This is financialization, gaining money from the ownership and trade of assets to generate profit, spanning from rent to stock trading and bitcoin.

The productive economy, balanced between production and consumption, taxing the wealthy to enable public health, public education, and public libraries, and regulating the excesses of neoliberalism, has now been sucked dry. As the state – public money – has bailed out the excesses and errors of the free market and enterprise, the commitment to neoliberalism has intensified. Importantly, Kennedy predicted the consequences of science and technological change being locked in the deathly embrace of neoliberalism to build vampire capitalism.

Scientific innovation existed before the Industrial Revolution. Bacon, Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, and Newton are a few examples. But the Industrial Revolution aligned technological change with progress. Through the neoliberal development of digitization, robotics, and artificial intelligence, production and consumption have been further unbalanced. Kennedy had aspired for what he described as “cognitive capitalism” (2016, 287) another version of the knowledge economy, or what Mason called “info-capitalism” (2020). All these phrases capture some attempt to reconfigure the energy and project of a left – or ‘the left’ – through a (post)capitalist transition. What was not predicted through these political revisionings was Generative AI, including epistemic injustice (Kano, 2025), the theft of information, knowledge, and intellectual property, while also outsourcing information literacy (Brabazon, 2011). Kennedy adds one more ingredient to his vampiric lens: hyper individualism. This ideology is built on the right to shop and consume, no matter what the cost, and that includes the cost to the environment. We, the modern consumers, are not vampire slayers. We are the vampire’s accomplices, and sometimes, the vampire’s familiar. We have allowed the simple to triumph over the difficult, comfort over discomfort, shopping over citizenship, and scrolling over reading. The cumulative impact of such ideologies has been revealed by Magalhães, who demonstrated the consequences of configuring some humans as consumable and disposable to enable the comfort of the few (2023, 949- 970). When the labour and the lives of the majority are denied, demeaned and dismissed, the claustropolitan moment has arrived.

Now that the vampires are coming for us, there are no weapons left. Citizens traded a wooden stake for a mobile phone. But the zombie movie always leaves a few humans for the resistance to start in the sequel. What about our vampire movie? What is to be our ending?

#### 4. Vampire Capitalism in our Present

Zombies have peppered apocalyptic popular culture, probing the Anthropocene and managing (or not managing) the consequences of climate change, ecological destruction and extinction. This is before poverty, homelessness, pandemics, and social fragmentation and destruction are addressed. Zombies are the ‘go to’ undead for global destruction. However, as Dale Hudson has argued (2017; 2024), vampires have a role in the Anthropocene. They are often heroes or antiheroes (Hudson, 2024, 97), or, as Bacon describes them, “Eco-vampires” (2020). Most significantly, their role, either intentionally or unintentionally is to be nostalgic – and celebrate the past over this future. This past was built on slavery, colonization, exploitation, few rights for women, neglect of the working class, and an array of structural injustices that allowed the few to dominate the rest.

This 21<sup>st</sup> century is the Vampire Century, and the consciousness of its characteristics is emerging into the second quarter of this century. This is the vampire capitalism moment, and because of Paul Kennedy, we have the theory to recognize it and to enact change. Simon Bacon has stated in his edited collection on *Vampires and the Making of the United States*, that, “the post-Trump America of the twenty-first century is a truly vampiric one” (2025, 1). The alignment between capitalism and vampirism has a long history (Goodall, 2025, 199). Joseph Laycock recognized in 2010 that, “vampires have been synonymous with the evils of capitalism for over three hundred years” (2009). Karl Marx is crucial to the building of this connection. In *Das Kapital*, he stated that, “dead labour that, vampire-like, only lives sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks” (2017). This metaphor captured the ongoing cycles of exploitation, sucking the time, the effort, the work, and the life from the living. This exploitation was also propulsive for Stoker’s narrative. Dracula’s exploitation was clear. He travelled to Britain from Transylvania because of land acquisition, and he manipulated his labourers throughout the book. It is the Marxist critic, Franco Moretti, who recognized in 1982, in the cauldron of Thatcher and Reagan’s governments, that, “Dracula is a true monopolist, solitary and despotic, he will not brook competition” (1982, 67). This prescient statement is key to understanding our future. This version of vampiric neoliberalism requires the unlimited freedom of a very few individuals to exploit most of the world’s population while summoning false equivalent freedoms of speech, gun ownership and shopping.

This is where the vampire capitalism story recommences. There is a detour through Louis Althusser (2009), noting the powerful analytical scaffolding from Matthew MacLellan (2013). Althusser critiqued the way in which Marx used the vampire metaphor, arguing that Marx’s vampire focused on the predatory nature of capitalism. Actually, the important innovation from Marx was that all modes of production, including capitalism, do not only exist in a linear fashion. They construct their own concept of history (or History) to verify the needs of the mode of production. Following Althusser, when valuing the synchronic over the diachronic, scholars can understand the role and function of history as it emerged *from* Vampire Capitalism, rather than history – capital H – encircling and framing Vampire Capitalism.

What is this synchronic history that juts from Vampire Capitalism? A few vampires – the techbrologarchy – have aligned digitization, hyper individualism, neoliberalism, deregulation and progressivist ideologies without limits or guardrails. A few men run the world. They are exploitative, narcissistic men. They have enabled, overtly and in plain sight, the killing of people in resistance to tyranny, shooting them in the face, a masking of paedophilia, rape and torture, and destroying intellectual competencies, including the capacity to read, to think, and to interpret, from an entire generation. Millions of people around the world are comfortable to mortgage their capacity to develop literacies for the right to put a

prompt into Generative AI, triggering AI slop for assessable assignments or general consumption. The pride in acknowledging these shortcuts, outsourcing their reading and writing, and devolving the capacity to develop expertise is irrational, ignorant, and sycophantic. Instead of public institutions fighting this absurd de-education in formal institutions of learning, polite conversations are being held about AI literacy. The imperative of education is traded for a future workforce that is AI ready, without probing what happens to work through such a transformation. This is, as Aronowitz and DiFazio confirmed (2010), the jobless future.

A compliant population is now primed to be sucked dry: uneducated, undereducated, illiterate, unable to read, unable to write, unable to think, and unable to interpret. They are in the techbrologarchy's thrall. The only defence available was information literacy, to disconnect the ideologies of technological change, innovation, progress and the public good. If there is a way out of this thrall, then what options are available? Kennedy provided some strategies.

- Valuing Indigenous nations, cultures and knowledge systems, learning about different operational logics for working with the environment.
- Valuing volunteer activities, based on kindness and care, that ensure societies remain operational.
- Valuing small-scale and independent farmers and farming.
- Valuing the Third Sector, spanning community organizations, voluntary organizations, social enterprises, and national and international non-governmental organizations (2016: 278-300).

These four strategies were not revolutionary in 2016. This was a reformist protocol, providing alternatives to Vampire Capitalism. The critique to be offered of Kennedy's reforms is that – predictably –the seriousness of our current situation was not predicted. Cities are now under siege. Citizens are being shot for protesting this siege. Children are groomed, trafficked, raped and killed. Children, as the most disempowered members of a society, are the most vulnerable and the most available for exploitation. They do not vote, but they can die.

Through repetitive restructures and ruthless neoliberalism, billions of people are living in fear of underemployment and unemployment. Deaths of despair are increasing (Case and Deaton, 2021). Through this chaos and catastrophe, the imperative is to look down at our phones, rather than up at the world. No reformist solution is viable. Neoliberal vampire capitalism will destroy itself. Climate change will end myriad industries, food supply chains, coastlines, and populations. This economy is based on consumerism: people in mediocre and unfulfilling jobs, living lives of banality and boredom, only interrupted by buying cheap goods created through the exploitation of an international workforce. If these pointless jobs are structurally removed from the workplace, then the purchase of mediocre consumer items can no longer take place. Suddenly, exploitation and poverty do not happen to 'foreigners,' who can be erased and marginalized through xenophobia and racism. Temu capitalism and Shein capitalism cease as the capacity to shop is destroyed by unemployment and underemployment. Working lives are no longer justified by consuming wasteful goods for a wasted life. Discomfort and consciousness finally emerge (Magalhães, 2023). This economy, which is already founded on catastrophic levels of debt, collapses. There can be no further bailouts. The thrall concludes until the last Instagram filter. The vampire techbrologarcs will run out of fresh blood. They too will die. They will die because of their greed. They will run out of victims on which to feed.

Stephanou described this as “game of fangs” (2017). In a system based on neoliberal, selfish consumption and freedom of consumer choice, what happens when that freedom is removed? We are the living answer: “ostracism, aggression and violence” (2017, 21). If there is an outside to – or a resolution of - this game of fangs, then the answers can only be found in refusal, consciousness, community, and never placing our freedom over the freedom of others.

## 5. Conclusion

It has been ten years since Kennedy published his book, and six years since his death. Together, if we are fortunate and the forces of exterminism can be managed or negotiated, then there may be a (post) Vampire Capitalism. The next ten years will reveal if there is courage in the world’s population to refuse, to be conscious, to value community, and to value the freedom of others. There are the seeds of that courage today, where humans are expressing their humanity and daring to be more than the blood banks for the techbrologarchy.

Hudson framed such research as using social theory for ‘world-making.’ The present article is using ‘old’ theory for ‘new remakings.’ Appropriately, this world making has emerged from a Cultural Studies scholar. Cultural Studies has entered into its own decline through neoliberal alignments with ‘industry partnerships’ and the ‘Creative Industries’ (Banks and O’Connor, 2009). It was a political and resistive discipline that offered defiant theorizations of capitalism, via *Resistance through Rituals* (Hall and Jefferson, 2006). The behaviours and practices of daily life could be interrogated and transformed. With such courage displaced and marginalized in the neoliberal university, or the “knowledge factory” as described by Stanley Aronowitz (2001), it is the moment to reclaim earlier moments in the history of ideas and recalibrate them for this toxic moment of fear, loss and confusion. To cite Steve Redhead, these are *Theoretical Times* (2017). The question remains: what theories can end the thrall of neoliberalism?

It is a moment for decisions, choices, and consciousness. Simon Bacon confirmed that, “Vampires are everywhere. Throughout history, where there have been questions over the nature of the afterlife, unexplained disease and deaths, or new people to that area that you just don’t like, there have been vampires” (2024). Yet, through Paul Kennedy’s theorization of the political economy, a new function has been created to understand the scale of the destruction, decay, and denial of contemporary exploitation. Citizens and consumers have become a food source as technology and progress continue their toxic embrace. The instability triggered by vampires to unsettle conceptualizations of life and death is now much more serious. As Kennedy confirmed, “lacking a stable frame of reference against which to measure reality or make sense of what is happening around us, and despite the attempt by advertisers and media experts to attract our attention and entice us with meanings, meaning eludes us” (2017, 180). Without meaning, signifiers float, bounce, and drift. Economic injustice is masked by xenophobic nationalisms. We are living through an Instagram filter. With consciousness, care, and compassion, the imperative is to remove the filter and return learning, teaching, education and interpretation to our daily lives. Yet with trusted institutions, such as schools, universities, medicine, the law and the family, now zombie concepts, the vampire’s thrall can continue without reality or ‘a stable frame of reference’ awakening its victims. But through Paul Kennedy’s legacy and monograph, a book that has received 45 citations in a decade, may guide us back to meaning, purpose and mattering.

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