

THE GRAMSCI GAP

THE OLD WORLD IS DYING

↓ loss of coherence

THE GAP: “A TIME OF MONSTERS”

↓ experiments / mutations

THE NEW WORLD STRUGGLES TO BE BORN

The gap is crowded with forms that do not quite belong to either world.

COHEN: THE MONSTER IS A CATEGORY CRISIS

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Monster Culture (Seven Theses)*

- 1 The monster's body is a cultural body
- 2 The monster always escapes
- 3 The monster is the harbinger of category crisis
- 4 The monster dwells at the gates of difference
- 5 The monster polices the borders of the possible
- 6 Fear of the monster is really a kind of desire
- 7 The monster stands at the threshold of becoming

For Protocol Fiction, Thesis III is the hinge: monsters reveal where a world's categories stop working.

A WORLD CONTAINS MANY TIMES AT ONCE

A world is a heterochrony of INHERITANCES + PROTOCOLS.

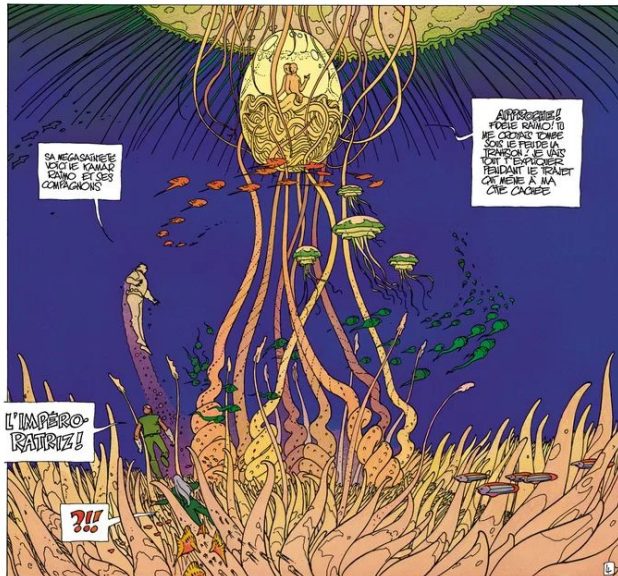
INHERITANCES carry the past forward
biological • embodied • cultural • material

PROTOCOLS organize what happens next

We do not enter a new technological world as new creatures. We bring older worlds with us.

Heterochrony = different historical times remaining operative in the same world.

A WORLD CONTAINS MANY TIMES AT ONCE



WHEN HISTORICAL TIMES COLLIDE

OLD CREATURE × NEW RULE

NEW CREATURE × OLD RULE

OLD RULE × NEW ENVIRONMENT

NEW RULE × OLD INSTITUTION



CATEGORY CRISIS

A thing becomes monstrous when the categories available to a world can no longer explain what it is doing there.

OLD MONSTER × NEW PROTOCOL

COVID — VIRUS + PANDEMIC EVENT

biological aftereffects • disrupted routines • blurred autobiographical time

×

AI — PROTOCOLS FOR WORKING WITH SYNTHETIC MEMORY

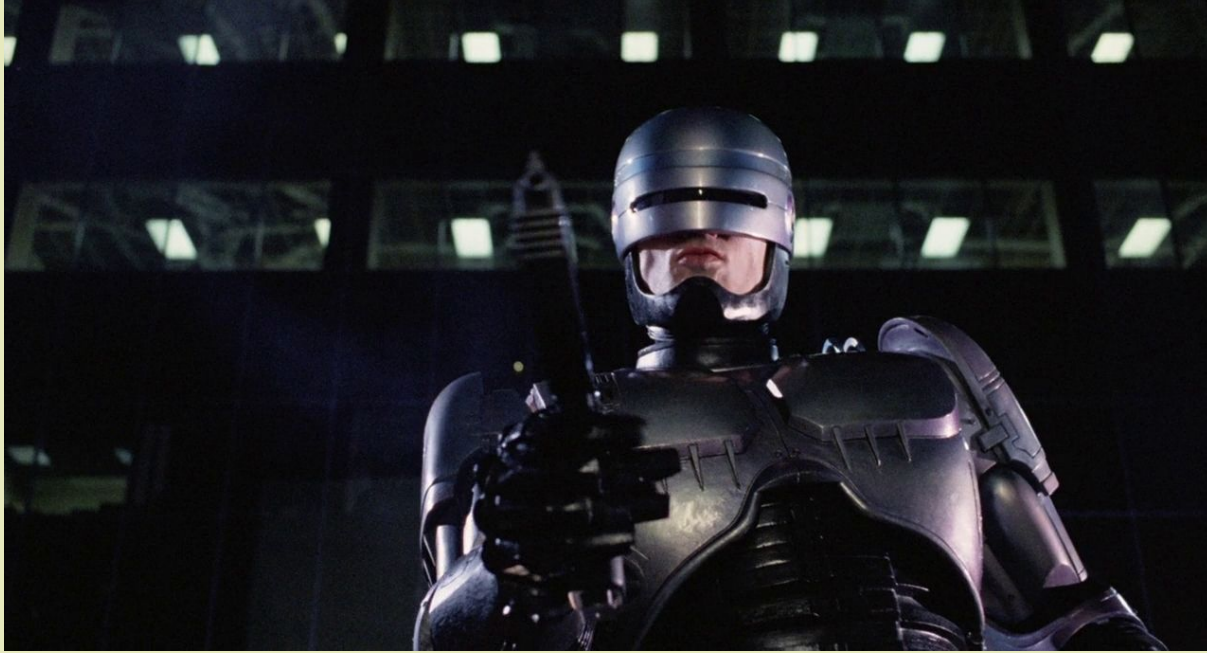
query • retrieve • delegate • reconstruct • externalize

↓

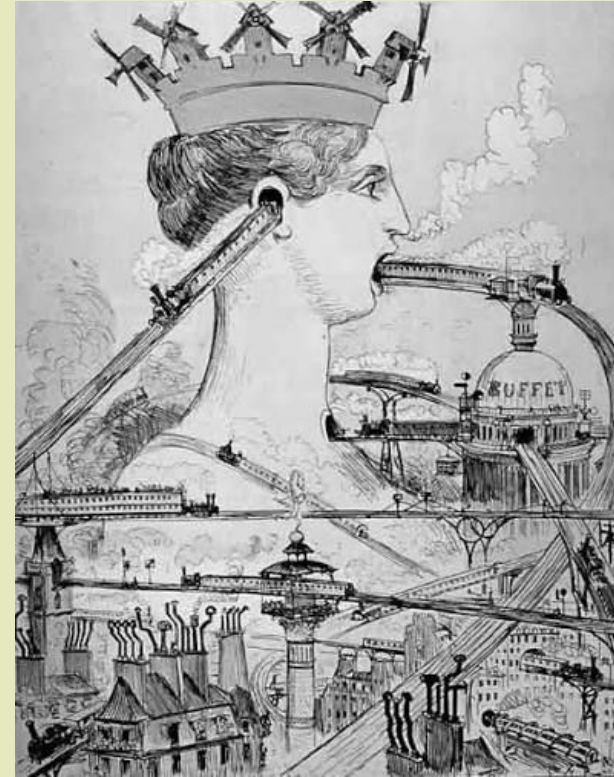
A DIFFERENT KIND OF PERSON

biological memory + artificial memory they do not completely control

80s war on drugs × robot technology



Medieval carnival × Modernity



CATEGORY CRISIS SUSPENDS THE GIVEN ORDER

NORMAL ORDER

categories tell us what things are → protocols tell us what they can do

↓ rupture

CATEGORY CRISIS

classification becomes uncertain → behavior becomes experimental

↓

MONSTROUS POSSIBILITY

new combinations become temporarily thinkable

BAKHTIN: CARNIVAL AS CATEGORY DISSOLUTION

Carnival temporarily suspends the categories of ordinary life.

king ↔ fool	sacred ↔ profane
high ↔ low	human ↔ animal
birth ↔ death	permitted ↔ forbidden

Bakhtin's grotesque image of the OLD PREGNANT HAG condenses incompatible categories:

OLD + NEW • DEATH + BIRTH • DECAY + BECOMING

The monstrous body makes transition visible.

BAKHTIN: CARNIVAL AS CATEGORY DISSOLUTION



CARNIVAL WAS A TEMPORARY WORLD

ORDER



CARNIVAL

rules suspended • identities reversed • grotesque forms permitted



ORDER RETURNS

Carnival creates a temporary laboratory for alternative categories — but traditionally its experiments are bounded in time.

The suspension ends. Old protocols resumes.

WHAT IF CARNIVAL CAN REMEMBER?

CARNIVAL + ARTIFICIAL MEMORY

Every strange rule can be recorded.

Every anomalous behavior can be copied.

Every temporary institution can become a template.

Every monstrous experiment can persist beyond the event.

The carnival is no longer merely a suspension of order.

IT BECOMES A TESTING GROUND FOR ORDERS THAT CAN
CONTINUE.

MICHAEL KOHLHAAS: WHEN THE EXCEPTION REMEMBERS

PREMISE

When ordinary justice fails, the exception can begin to imitate the forms by which law reproduces itself.

MICHAEL KOHLHAAS

local grievance



failure of ordinary law



suspension of obedience to that law



self-authorized justice



temporary rival jurisdiction

MONSTROUS REALITY

OLD WORLD



SUSPENSION / CARNIVAL



MONSTROUS EXPERIMENT



MEMORY



REPETITION + IMITATION



PROTOCOL



NEW WORLD

A monster stops being monstrous when a world reorganizes itself around it.

A GRAMMAR FOR MONSTROUS WORLDING

MONSTER $\rightarrow$ RULES
monster generates rules

MONSTER $\leftarrow$ RULES
monster is shaped by rules

So ask two questions:

WHAT RULES MADE THIS MONSTER?
WHAT RULES DOES THIS MONSTER MAKE?

FOUR MONSTROUS RELATIONS

OLD MONSTER → OLD RULES

reproduction • traditionalism • bureaucracy • Kafka

OLD MONSTER ← NEW RULES

obsolete creature metabolizes an arriving world • weird fiction

NEW MONSTER ← OLD RULES

new deviant exploits / recombines inherited protocols • punk • hacker • heretic

NEW MONSTER → NEW RULES

mutation becomes world-building • Ballard • emergent societies

The arrows describe historical motion, not just classification.

FICTION OF THE GAP

KAFKA — inherited systems endlessly reproduce themselves

BALLARD — environments mutate; subjects discover new adaptations

PUNK — new creatures recombine the symbolic material of the old order

THE CULTURE / OUTSIDE CONTEXT PROBLEM — encounter with something for which the civilization's categories were not built

BORGES, TLÖN — an invented ontology escapes fiction and begins reorganizing reality

PROTOCOL FICTION: DON'T START WITH THE MONSTER

CHANGE A RULE.

Ask who can no longer live normally under it.

Ask what new creature can.

Ask what happens if that creature is remembered, copied, and imitated.

Then ask: WHAT NEW RULES DOES THE MONSTER LEAVE BEHIND?

Irresolvable Tensions: Writing Monsters, Metaphors, and Protocols



Ice breaker:

- Pick a favorite monster (extra credit for a particularly “protocolish” monster)
- Spend 1 minute to write down:
 - 2 nouns
 - 2 verbs
 - 4 adjectives
 - (Don’t name the monster!)
- Post in the chat and see if we can guess each other’s monsters.

Example:

- Frankenstein(‘s monster):
 - Science, Electricity, Groan, Read, Dull Yellow, Strong, Living, Tall

Metaphor = Vehicle + Tenor

Tenor (“I wandered lonely”) + [“as a”] +

Vehicle (“cloud”) = Metaphor

- The metaphor is the whole thing, not the “I” or the “cloud” but both.

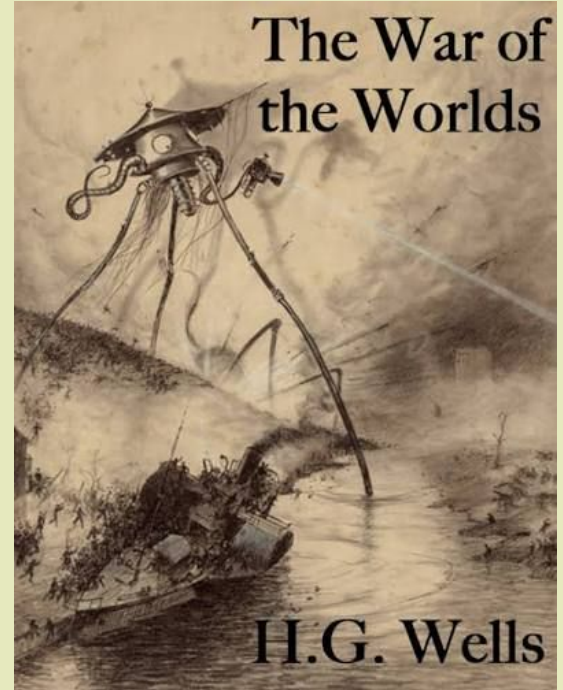
In any good metaphor the vehicle and the tenor will both expand the other’s definition (bi-directionally). This can often explain why bad metaphors are bad (‘Life is like a rollercoaster’ does almost nothing for my sense of rollercoasters). They get their power from the divergence and surprise between the two component parts some of which stays unresolved



Metaphor pt. 2

Metaphors can operate on the level of the sentence (“I wandered lonely as a cloud”). Or on the level of a whole scene, image, or story. In H.G. Wells’ *War of the Worlds* the alien invasion functions as a metaphor for colonial destruction. If the metaphor completely collapses, then it no longer functions as a story. On a thematic level it becomes a mere lesson, rather than a story.

We have a name for when a metaphor no longer functions (i.e., “a chair leg” doesn’t evoke actual limbs anymore): A Dead Metaphor



Exercise: Dead Metaphors → Undead Metaphors

Eye of a needle
Heart of the
matter
Spill the beans
Close but no
cigar
Kick the bucket
Under the
weather
Cold shoulder
Skeleton staff
Leaf through a
book
Branching out

How to
reanimate a
dead metaphor?
Make both its
vehicle and
tenor lively
again.

Techniques:

- Imagery
- Proximity
- Surprise

“He grabbed the chair leg” (dead metaphor)

- Break the original metaphor apart: Chair and Animalistic Leg.
- Find which part is “dead” (the ‘leg’).
- Use that to pull out the imagery and reanimate:

“The crowbar came down hard against his shin (image of a human leg). The bone cracked like a wooden stick as his limb folded (proximate metaphor likening bone ↔ wood). He grabbed a nearby chair leg, dug his nails into the soft wood (surprise sensory touch further animalizes the chair leg), and screamed.”

Exercise: Resurrect a “dead metaphor”

Eye of a needle

Heart of the matter

Spill the beans

Close but no cigar

Kick the bucket

Under the weather

Cold shoulder

Skeleton staff

Leaf through a book

Branching out

Close but no cigar

Instructions:

- Take a dead metaphor from the list (or one you think of!)
- Try to reanimate it in 3-5 sentences using 2 or 3 of these techniques:
 - Establish the “dead” part of the metaphor as imagery or action (A literal bucket, an actual cigar)
 - Use an adjacent metaphor that isn’t dead nearby (“The flaming house burned like the end of a cigar”)
 - Attach a surprising sensory or physical description to the dead metaphor

Monster as metaphor

Tenor (I wandered lonely) +[as a]+ Vehicle (cloud) = Metaphor

- The metaphor is the whole thing, not the “I” or the “cloud” but both.

The old world dying + the new world struggling to be born = monster

- The monster is both the old world and the new world.

In any good metaphor the vehicle and the tenor will both expand the other's definition (bi-directionality). This is why bad metaphors are bad (Life is like a rollercoaster does almost nothing for my sense of rollercoasters). They get their power from the divergence and surprise between the two component parts.

Any good monster will expand one's understanding of both the present and the future.

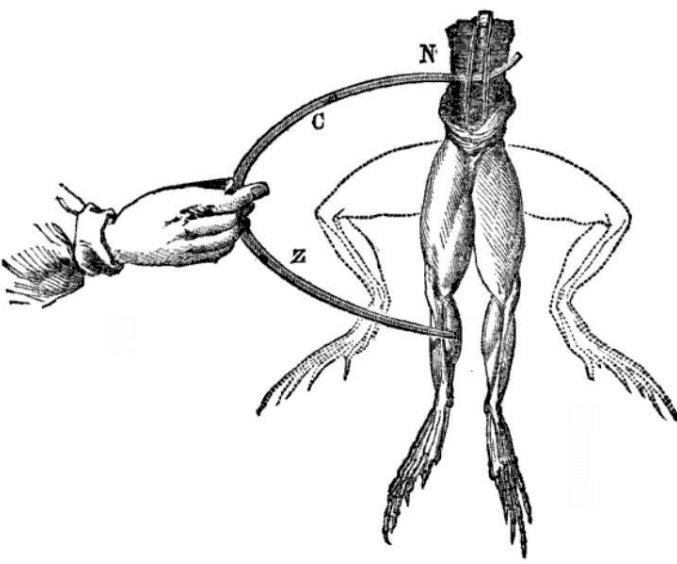
Why monsters and protocols?

Protocols, Monsters and Metaphors share a structure:

- Argument + Agents (those involved in argument) = Protocol
- Old World dying + New World being born = Monsters
- Vehicle + Tenor = Metaphor

All rely on a continual interplay between two component parts. If an argument fully resolves, the need for a protocol disappears. If a monster becomes fully Old World or New World, they are no longer monstrous. If the distance between vehicle and tenor collapses, the metaphor dies.

Monsters, protocols, and metaphors share a habitat:
The seam of difference.



Monstrous Metaphors, Monstrous Protocols, and Protocolized Monsters

Exercise: Let's begin stretching our metaphor-muscles and our protocol fiction monster creations!

Step 1: Find a seam between the Old World and the New World: Bring forth a monster!

Step 2: Find an argument and its agents: Imagine a Protocol

Step 3: Find an image and a moment: Make a metaphor.

Step 4: Turn them into a story.

Find a Seam; Make a Monster

Old World:

- Presence/Absence
- Nature
- Industrial/Finance Capital
- Nation/Territory

New World:

- Pattern/Randomness
- New Nature
- Techno Capital
- Network/Platform

Monster:

- An AI that equates pattern with presence and absence with randomness to make its moral decisions
- What is the “man-eating tiger” of new nature?

Monster:

The man's ramblings were incoherent, alingual. The robot did not understand why such randomness would, or even could, resist being garbage collected.

Find an argument; find its protocol

Argument	Agent(s):	Protocol
- Who owns this institution? - How will we preserve cultural memory? - Should this [X] have rights?	- Human to Human - AI to AI - AI to Human - AI to Organism - Organism to Organism - Client to Server	- Real - HTTPS - “I cut you choose” - Imagined - FTL seat belt regulations - Asteroid Mining safety protocols

Protocol:

The Collection Protocol was created to help prevent the billions of chatterbox LLM nodes that experienced mass hallucination, drift, or collapse from creating an untraversable informational sludge. Produced language is judged based on a reality-reference threshold. Entities that drop below that range are garbage collected.

Find an image and a moment; Make a metaphor

Image

- Ants following pheromone trails
- Natural features (mountains, rivers, skies, celestial objects)
- Domestic (house, blanket, chair, tea kettle)
- etc.

Moment

- Someone traverses
- Someone meets someone
- Someone gets angry
- Someone gets happy
- Someone learns something
- Someone changes

Metaphor

- Sentence Level
- Story Level

Metaphor:

In the tremulous wake of language-generating entities proliferating wildly across the internet, browsing once sterile webpages and dead message boards began to feel like living through a digital Cambrian Explosion.

Combine the three and you have the shape of a protocol fiction monster story!

Monster + Protocol + Metaphor

Monster:

The man's ramblings were incoherent – alingual. The robot did not understand why such randomness would, or even could, resist being garbage collected.

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