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Becoming Anti-Human: How Lovecraftian Horror Philosophically Deconstructs Otherness

The most horrifying monster is change. Having the comfort and consistency of normality be thrust into the foreign landscape of difference can be petrifying. The dormant mind can lose its sense of self, security, and, worst of all, control. In the horror genre, this is no different. Monsters are frightening because of the difference they impose on us and our identity. Imagining a world ruled by a zombie apocalypse or a ravenous vampire feasting at night may seem unobtrusive, but when the rabid ghoul trespasses the border of detached fiction into the interior of one's identity, the cliché skeleton seems almost an afterthought. Much more terrifying than the grotesqueness or typicality of these horror villains is how they can turn one's sense of self and control inside out. It invites the elusive glance inward, asking the subject to wonder if their pillars of psychological safety—identity, family, belief system, home—are very safe at all. This fear of something different is compartmentalized by the psyche as something so alien, so invasive, that it must be something Other.

This effect is explored by the stories of Howard Philips Lovecraft, a horror writer whose stories are so bizarre that the average reader is stripped of all their preconceptions about reality and even their sense of self. This special subgenre of horror was pioneered by Lovecraft and is famously called "Lovecraftian horror" but is well known today as cosmic horror: A mesh of horror and science fiction that "erodes presumptions about the nature of reality" (Cardin 273). In

this sense, Lovecraft's cosmic horror evokes monsters and entities that challenge the human mind: a fish-frog biped that is just as civilized as the reader, canine humanoids that question the reader's humanity, an immortal sea monster that speaks in an ineffable yet intelligent language, and an infinite-being that is a legion of selves challenging the oneness of identity. All of these unorthodox entities invert one's concept of self and reality, always pivotally challenging one's comfortable normality. However, during the interwar period of the 20th century, when Lovecraft wrote the majority of his horror stories, his genre was misrepresented by being grouped within the larger circle of pulp fiction¹. The prolific author wrote for an early 20th-century pulp magazine, *Weird Tales*, founded by J.C. Henneberger and J.M. Lansinger but pulp fiction was viewed by the general public as the "epitome of disposable culture," thereby cementing Lovecraft's work as "low" art² (Poole).

At odds with literary popularity, Lovecraft's only rise to fame was posthumous, but his influence is unbounded nonetheless. Many scholars see him as the bridge between 19th- and 20th-century horror, influenced by the likes of Edgar Allan Poe and Ambrose Bierce while simultaneously influencing 21st-century horror writers, such as China Mieville and even Stephen King (Kneale). After Lovecraft died of small intestine cancer at 46, his close friends August Derleth and Donald Wandrei created Arkham House, a publishing company meant for Lovecraft's posthumous work and those of other unrecognized pulp fiction writers (Kneale). This led his work to become archived and revitalized for a new generation of readers, many of whom

¹ A colloquial term for presumably cheap fiction in quality, ranging from genres of "westerns and detective stories to romances and science fiction," and named after the poor paper it was printed on (Baldick).

² In fact, Lovecraft's genre was derided as too obscure and unconventional for the modernism movement of literature at the time, something Lovecraft himself revolted as a "rotten age" of "feeble comforts and thwarted energies" (Poole).

found undiscovered value in the unique author, invoking Lovecraft in scholarship. The majority of scholars today see Lovecraft's themes of cosmic horror—subverting anthropocentrism and invalidating the human—as nihilistic and pessimistic. Even keystone names in Lovecraft scholarship, such as Michael Houellebecq³, say Lovecraft's stories are “against life,” and to read them is “to feel a true aversion to life in all its forms” (Houellebecq 14, 29). However, postmodern scholars, such as Lovecraft biographer S.T. Joshi and philosopher Gilles Deleuze, began to see Lovecraft's works as a collective function to confront these other forms and ideas of life that our close-mindedness as humans may preliminarily be averse to—the Other.

The concept of Otherness, the “quality of being different” and deviating from a perceived self-identity or social identity, is what drives Lovecraft's characters into madness (Miller). The binary between “I” and “Other” is a concept evaluated in depth through philosopher, scholar, and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva in her work, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Being an undefined, unspecific “object,” Otherness comes from the “fragile texture of a desire” for constructed meaning. In sacrifice for this desperate meaning, this object of Otherness is abjected to allow us to be “more or less detached and autonomous,” ignoring something that we would rather treat as “insignificant.” Otherwise, the Other or the “abject,” a “jettisoned object” that opposes our own secure identity, would draw us to a place “where meaning collapses” (Kristeva 1-2). This meaning is built not by objectivity but subjectivity, filtering everything through a lens of our desired categories—one being us and a second being the Other. Kristeva notes how this Other is abjected, “annihilated,” because they are on the edge of such categories that if Otherness

³ Michael Houellebecq is a famous French author and literary scholar whose biography of Lovecraft, *Against Life, Against the World*, situated himself as a very prominent figure in Lovecraft scholarship.

in its reality is acknowledged, the border that secures self-identity from the Other is dissolved—therefore annihilating us. This concept is furthered by post-structuralist⁴ philosopher Gilles Deleuze in his many works, most notably in his collaboration with psychoanalyst Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*.

Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* is a socio-political philosophical text on numerous aspects of our lives in a capitalist society, including our tendency as humans to think categorically and incite binary opposition. The second part of their two-part magnum opus, *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, *A Thousand Plateaus* finds philosophical value in Lovecraft's work through its confrontation of Otherness, which they briefly invoke. They discuss how human perception and socially defined structures detrimentally force us to "isolate all operations from the conditions of intuition, making them true intrinsic concepts" through categorization. Instead, they praise what they call the "ambulant or nomad sciences," which follow the "flow of matter" and are predicated on the "sensible conditions of intuition and construction" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 373). They find that our "categorical, apodictic apparatus," while convenient, disregards the sensitive evaluation of those beings or ideas on the interstice between or the cusp beyond categorization: the Other (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 373). Lovecraft, however, had a literary fondness for this anti-human grey area.

Rejecting the categorization of human thought, Lovecraft's stories confront and philosophically negotiate with Otherness. Despite his lauded genre of cosmic horror being

⁴ Post-structuralism is a philosophical movement in response to structuralism, a philosophy that invited an "emphasis on structures rather than textures, on codes and systems rather than contents and meanings" (Sutherland, "Structuralism"). Deleuze and other post-structuralists desired to dismantle these "rules and patterns of coherence" in societal structure (Sutherland, "Post-structuralism").

otherworldly, there is a crux of realism in his stories—how his characters, upon witnessing and internalizing Otherness, become victims of madness. This madness is a much-debated topic among Lovecraft scholars, but it is undoubtedly realistic in how it portrays the vitriolic reaction the conditioned human mind has on the intruding Other. While Houellebecq and similar scholars may see this ineluctable consequence as an affirmation of those socially drawn borders of “I” and “Other,” Joshi and Deleuze find that this realism of madness becomes “not a goal but a function” with Lovecraft (Schultz). Lovecraft forces the reader to not only confront Otherness but the flaws of their anthropocentric and coddled preconceptions which paranoically disregard the Other for their own sanity. In this manner, Lovecraft doesn’t tout Otherness as something to just accept but rather showcases how to accept it in a realistic, methodical way: confront our human preconceptions that negate the Other’s intrusion into our psychological purview. This is why Lovecraft was displeased with “horrific conventions like ghosts and vampires” and instead dabbled in the unbearably different that which “neither magic nor science can make [. . .] human and familiar” (Kneale).

To portray this, in this paper I will delve into four of Lovecraft’s stories: “Dagon” (1919), “Pickman’s Model” (1931), “The Call of Cthulhu” (1928), and “Through the Gate of the Silver Key” (1933). Each story has both narrators and side characters contend with different philosophical aversions towards Otherness, all of which are instigated by the preconceived human notion of categorical thinking. This leads to a perception that derides and fears the Other, but by Lovecraft’s various entities and the madness that grows in these characters, he provides a philosophical template to confront Otherness. By applying philosophical concepts from Deleuze and literary scholarship, I will illustrate how Lovecraft’s cosmic horror, its entities, and their

characteristics, builds this template—an ultimately empathetic and inclusive philosophy.

Through analysis of Deleuzian becomings in Lovecraft's stories, the anthropocentric connotation of madness in the witnesses of cosmic horror, the fragile security of human language and perception, and how one such character epitomizes a non-categorical cosmic identity, Lovecraft's horror collapses normally unquestioned binaries that abject Otherness and thus attempts to strip the veil of a categorical mind from the reader. With this anthropocentric adherence to categorical thinking thereby deconstructed, the reader is able to rightfully accept a supposed Otherness.

Deleuze finds Lovecraft's stories to have a transformative effect on the reader, causing an involution of their identity to accept the Other. The realism Joshi describes in Lovecraft and his monsters acts as the catalyst for a becoming-animal, a Deleuzian concept, to occur to the reader. Only when they are exposed to something that goes against the apropos of human expectations, such as Lovecraft's otherworldly monsters, will a becoming occur. This becoming-animal is a psychological metamorphosis for the reader where they begin to consider themselves as the animal, or monster in this case, they are subjected to. To Deleuze, Lovecraft's entities are these "demonic animals," ones that transform the comparative human with a "becoming" and a "tale" (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 241). While the regular comparison-animals, which Deleuze calls "Oedipal" and "Jungian" animals, would act as placeholders for characteristics⁵, demonic animals intrude on the human mind, forcing one to treat the Other with the same consideration they would treat themselves (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 240). This happens to the numerous characters in Lovecraft's stories who witness the cosmic horror: They

⁵ One can say 'I eat like a pig,' but in no way does this embody the animal or treat the animal as a whole being. It is merely a mode of comparison and it treats the animal (which, in this case, would be the Other) as a characteristic rather than an individual.

undergo a complete mental rewiring. They begin to see that “a time will come” when they must accept these immense entities into their human worldview (“The Call of Cthulhu” 169). The reader is thus forced to consider and expect the boundaries of what they comprehend and what they consider as Other. However, how the becoming occurs in each of Lovecraft’s stories varies.

One of Lovecraft’s earliest works, “Dagon”, displays a becoming-animal that forces the narrator to confront an animal hybrid that exists along a categorical interstice, breaking down the categorization of species that displaces the Other. The narrator, a “degenerate” heroin addict, is captured by a German sea-raider during the Great War and wakes up alone, “adrift and free” (1). Reaching an “unbroken monotony” of rolling land floating in the ocean, he discovers a bas-relief depicting creatures half-man, half-fish (3). Looking over a summit, he then sees what is assumed to be Dagon, a fish deity with “gigantic scaly arms” who vents “certain measured sounds.” However horrific this may be to the reader, a Deleuzian lens reveals that what strikes terror in the narrator is Dagon’s “interkingdom coalescence” (MacCormack). He is both fish and human, scaly and bipedal, intelligent and bestial, and articulate (in some phyletic language for fish) yet incomprehensible. What is more bewildering to the lone human is how, according to the bas-relief, he and his people have or had a society underwater for ages—long before mankind. Continental philosophy scholar Patricia MacCormack notes this as a Deleuzian concept, the “phenomenon of bordering” (MacCormack). Deleuze himself would call “demonic animals,” such as Dagon, “outsiders”: those who are on the edge of being part of one multiplicity (group or species) or another (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 245). This bordering confronts the narrator’s and, by extension, the reader’s sense of categorical thinking, inciting the reaction of fear. We see fish as fish and humans as humans, and anything to contradict those

compartments makes us consider a new equivalent group of beings that must in some way be empathetically like us, even monsters such as Dagon, a form of the Other. To display this bombardment on the mind, the narrator, like most witnesses in Lovecraft's stories, goes mad and becomes paranoid of Dagon crawling through his "window! The window!" (6). However, this madness is the window into philosophical expansion, not mental imprisonment.

Despite what Houellebecq and similar scholars may suggest, the madness that Lovecraft's characters exhibit in their final written moments is a window into the collapsing of their categorical preconceptions: They are thrust into it, forced to internalize Otherness as no binaries could exclude it anymore. While Houellebecq believes Lovecraft showcased these hybrid monsters to affirm that life outside the human "is itself evil," other Lovecraft scholars and particular stories display how madness is not evidence of external evil but evidence of internal bias (Houellebecq 82). Anthropocentrism plays a strong role in Lovecraft's characters with almost all of them portraying it in some form. For instance, the narrator in "Dagon" is horrified and mentally burdened by the existence of such hybrid fish-humans because their categorical ambiguity disallows the characters to exclude them as Other from the human. Post-doc researcher of Theory and Criticism, Ben Woodard, points out that this anthropocentric view of madness is what postmodern philosopher Michel Foucault calls a "form of exclusionary social control," where people and society will demarcate madness from reason (Woodard). Similarly, the characters in Lovecraft's stories will separate themselves and their preferred reality from anything resembling the Other. Dagon and his worshippers appear again in Lovecraft's novella, "A Shadow over Innsmouth", whereupon coming across a fictional town full of fish-frog humanoids at Innsmouth, Massachusetts, a different narrator is ashamed that he is genetically

related to them. He notes how the Dagon-worshipping hybrids, called the Deep Ones, are “flopping, hopping, croaking, bleating” like frogs, yet “their forms vaguely suggested the anthropoid” (328). What scares the narrator into a kind of madness is not their acts or appearance themselves but their “geographical proximity to threshold kingdoms” (MacCormack). They jeopardize the categorical mind as they elude placement in these “kingdoms,” or categories. Furthermore, they are frighteningly human-like—in appearance, intelligence, and civilization—thus threatening an anthropocentric worldview. Therefore, the madness that results from a becoming-animal is one that expands the horizons of thought, breaking its social limits to accept the Other which may be beyond or in-between. Lovecraft displays this consideration for madness more obviously in “Pickman’s Model”.

In this horror story, Lovecraft reveals how along with an interkingdom bordering, the prospect of becoming inhuman can frighten the human mind to a point of madness—that madness being a conflicted interiorization of the Other that would normally be rejected. The story begins with the narrator, Thurber, revoking controversial artist Richard Upton Pickman from the Boston Art Club for his gruesomely “daemonic portraiture,” based on real monsters as the models (49). However, Pickman has recently disappeared and on occasion, Thurber explains in an anecdote to his friend, Elliot, why he revoked Pickman’s club membership. He recalls how one day he went with Pickman to his personal gallery in an antiquated alleyway house far from Boston’s main streets. There, he sees Pickman’s paintings, the ones he chose not to show in public, and in them “madness and monstrosity lay in the figures in the foreground” (49). Pickman drew canine-humanoids which “approached humanity in varying degree,” looking scarily human and even implied to the narrator that the “dog-things were developed from

mortals!” (50). What scares Thurber, even more, is how Pickman had given the faces of these “changelings” and their features “a very perceptible resemblance to his own” (“Pickman’s Model”). This is another instance of becoming-animal as Pickman begins to see himself, as Thurber observes, similar to these creatures—so much so, he begins to display features uncannily alike to them. Pickman thus represents a becoming-inhuman where, as Deleuze puts it, one reaches a state of in-betweenness, being categorized as something “neither genetic nor structural; they are interkingdoms, unnatural participations” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 242). In this sense, Pickman’s art, and signs of his appearance, begin to display a form of the Other, canine and human-like, as a being in between the functions of taxonomic categorization. Furthermore, by exposing us to this Other, qualifying it, and necessitating its existence, Lovecraft emphasizes how despite disagreeing with the human’s categorical mind, they are a part of life and therefore should not be ignored.

This is further developed as “Pickman’s Model” continues, becoming a befitting template to read Lovecraft’s other stories off of, commenting on how madness and the Other reveal not just horror but a beauty of life that goes against the subjective human mind. The descent into trancelike disgust that Thurber purports in “Pickman’s Model” is because Pickman’s art is a “relentless enemy of all mankind,” and is the “degradation of the moral tenement” (51). This “mankind” and “moral tenement” he is speaking of is the socially conditioned human mind that despises the inhuman, or animalistic human, being accepted. Pickman’s art achieves this by rejecting “selectiveness” and the need to paint in a “blurred, distorted, or conventionalised” style like other art (51). With a Deleuzian lens, this “selectiveness” is a strong metaphor for the human mind and social fabric in their desire to reject Other beings, ideas, and things—rather choosing to

hold onto conventional, hegemonic thought, and nothing epitomizes said thought more than easily recognizable and anthropocentric categories. Thus, anything forming a “departure from the usual,” such as the Other, could be seen as “vile things” as Lovecraft showcases with Thurber (50, 51). However, it isn’t all horrific as Thurber, and by extension, Lovecraft, admits that “the *faces*, Eliot, those accursed *faces*, that leered and slacered out of the canvas” are “the very breath of life!” (50). To the narrator, who attempts to drown his madness with alcohol while remembering, the faces are unbearably “alive,” being the personification for life and “stark objectivity” (51). By detailing the catalyst of his horror as the painted creatures’ “faces,” Lovecraft accentuates that what derails the categorical mind is something recognizably inhuman. The choice of “faces,” something which one uses to identify and differentiate humans among each other and from animals, makes it an apt synecdoche for humankind and its “kingdom” of identity—with anything infringing it (as a category) causing such madness. By describing the art style’s objectivity, Pickman as a “realist,” and faces causing the horror, “Pickman’s Model” becomes a model itself for how madness functions in Lovecraft’s other stories as well, which follow, as Joshi calls it, the same diminution of human thought as “part of a single aesthetic aim” (51, Schultz). However, Lovecraft doesn’t only elude human thought with an interspecies Other.

In “The Call of Cthulhu”, Lovecraft derails the human mind and its categorization by disrupting sense at the level of language, challenging the anthropocentric view of language and how a common human language reifies an ‘us versus Other’ discrimination. Lovecraft’s most popular story, “The Call of Cthulhu”, deals with narrator Francis Wayland Thurston and his discovery of numerous notes left by his great uncle, George Gammel Angell, a famous professor of Semitic languages at Brown University. Thurston recounts this discovery by analyzing and

paraphrasing the notes left by Angell which recall cults, rituals, and a bas-relief all surrounding a presumably mythical being, Cthulhu. Thurston first notes how he, despite the madness that will inevitably befall him and others, saw “dread glimpses of truth flashed out from an accidental piecing together of separated things,” making it clear that madness is the vitriolic reaction to newfound truth (140). After finding a bas-relief which has an engraved image of Cthulhu, who is himself an amalgamation of animal species, Thurston learns its moniker, “*Cthulhu fhtagn*,” which spirals the characters into distress because it easily breaks human conventions of language (143). He learns of design student Wilcox and his dreams of Cthulhu and his language, which he heard in a “voice that was not a voice” (143). Wilcox recorded his dreams which inspire Angell’s research, but the name terrified all that read or heard it. The name is described to be an “unpronounceable jumble of letters,” and a letter written by Lovecraft in 1934 expands on this:

The word is supposed to represent a fumbling human attempt to catch the phonetics of an *absolutely non-human* word. The name of the hellish entity was invented by beings whose vocal organs were not like man’s, hence it has no relation to the human speech equipment. The syllables were determined by a physiological equipment wholly unlike ours, *hence could never be uttered perfectly by human throats*. In the story we have human beings who habitually use the word as best they can; but all they can do is to approximate it.

What shocks the characters is how the harsh mesh of consonants and few vowels creates an “*absolutely non-human* word,” yet it still correlates to an intelligent language. The characters’ attempt to “approximate it” in English is an attempt to reclaim back linguistic superiority, something that humans have used to distinguish themselves from animals and fictional monsters

in an anthropocentric ideology. As English Professor at Texas A&M University Andrew Pilsh puts it, such inhuman language will “produce a sense of a being that is fully and truly alien” to us (Pilsh). This is another form of Deleuzian phenomenon bordering, where the category of language, assumed to be unique and superior in humans, is disrupted, entered into by another species, the Other. Cthulhu’s language is a part of Otherness, a facet of another being which is equal or even dominant to our own yet so different that we reel from it. Later Cthulhu’s bas-relief along with other documents from Angell is shown to a council of “half the world’s expert learning in [the linguistic] field” (149). Along with the interspecies drawing of Cthulhu, the bas-relief has the line “*Ph,nglui mglw ’nafh Cthulhu R’lyeh wgah ’nagl fhtagn,*” which the experts find “form the least notion of even the remotest linguistic kinship” (149-150). They find it so far beyond human linguistics that it asserts “something horribly remote and distinct” from mankind—once again emphasizing how expanding the border of human categories into the realm of Other, whether language or biological taxonomy, is what is most “frighteningly suggestive” of all (149).

“The Call of Cthulhu” also expands beyond categories by breaking scientific laws of nature which render the witnesses mad, once more indicating that breaking human preconceptions of reality is another form of Deleuzian “bordering” of human thought into Otherness. Firstly, the bas-relief Thurston initially finds in Angell’s belongings yields “simultaneous pictures of an octopus, a dragon, and a human caricature”—already displaying the phenomenon bordering and interkingdoms between categories of species Deleuze discusses (141). However, Thurston begins to learn through secondhand experience how Cthulhu is even beyond the earthly animals he may resemble. After following stories of cults—Theosophist

colonies, “hysterical Levantines,” and voodoo cults—who worship the “Great Old Ones⁶,” which includes Cthulhu, Thurston stumbles upon the *Sydney Bulletin* with an article about a derelict ship named *Emma* that traveled through the Pacific Ocean and came back with only one survivor (146, 153). That last survivor was found holding onto an idol, described as Cthulhu, which prompts Thurston to travel to Australia to search for more. There he meets the widow of Johansen, one of *Emma*’s crewmen, and finds his manuscript. Reading it, Thurston finds out how the *Emma* triggered the resurfacing of Cthulhu and his castle, R’lyeh, from its sleeping, underwater state. When Johansen and his crew stumble upon R’lyeh in the Pacific, they find its walls “too great to belong to any thing right or proper for this earth” (165). They insinuate the architecture is not “proper” and instead “impious,” with its geometry being “abnormal, non-Euclidean” with “elusive angles [...] where a second glance shewed concavity after the first shewed convexity” (166). This breaking of human prescribed scientific and geometric laws becomes a “terrible reality” for the sailors which indicates, through a Deleuzian lens, a becoming (166). They are forced to internalize these seemingly preexisting angles and impossible architecture as a scientific reality. Again, similar to “Pickman’s Model”, while seeing such a reality is beyond human understanding and brings “pure fright,” Thurston notes how they “must be horrors of the mind alone,” emphasizing that anything Other, even architecture and science, must be a part of reality even if the subjective mind alienates it as horrific (167). Human science and geometry, still forms of categories, end up being expanded, and this glimpse into new realms of Otherness in science made the men wonder “how any door in the universe could be so vast” (166).

⁶ The Great Old Ones are immortal beings that were rulers and gods over Earth but now reside stagnant yet eternal in various locations around Earth in Lovecraft’s cosmic horror universe.

Cthulhu becomes an entity that broadens this door of perception in its witnesses to horrifying lengths but does so as a creature of incomprehension, both in its nature and its effect; therefore, causing a becoming-imperceptible to the characters, where they must accept Otherness or lose their sanity. Unlike in “Dagon” or “Pickman’s Model”, Cthulhu does not merely cause a becoming-animal but, as Deleuze calls it, a “becoming-imperceptible” as well (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 252). What the characters must internalize are not merely category-defying animal traits but a category-defying perception and existence. Cthulhu first appears in student Wilcox’s dreams, and cult members’ dreams, thereby living at the “threshold consciousness, lying dead but dreaming” (MacCormack). Moreover, when witnessing his castle, which exists beyond geometric human laws, and when seeing Cthulhu, they cannot describe it:

The Thing cannot be described—there is no language for such abysses of shrieking and immemorial lunacy, such eldritch contradictions of all matter, force, and cosmic order. A mountain walked or stumbled. God! What wonder that across the earth a great architect went mad, and poor Wilcox raved with fever in that telepathic instant? The Thing of the idols, the green, sticky spawn of the stars, had awaked to claim his own. (167)

The indescribable creature reaches “eldritch contradictions of all matter, force, and cosmic order” to the point where they questioned if God existed and would “rest them” (167). Such a thing so imperceptible, “immemorial”, and impossible to understand not only supersedes any normative anthropocentrism the men may exhibit but also challenges what they thought was possible to exist, something beyond their human laws and thought. Cthulhu lies in an in-between state—he is sleeping yet eternal, waking yet dreaming, and dead yet alive. One of Cthulhu’s cult members even note of an ominous couplet:

*“That is not dead which can eternal lie,
And with strange aeons even death may die.” (156)*

The mysterious line cements Cthulhu’s immense existence beyond human thought: In its eternal form, even the concept of death is no more. Cthulhu, an eternal cosmic entity in an interdimensional state, thus forces its witnesses to travel beyond the “plane of consistency,” as Deleuze puts it, where “instead of each fold⁷ being perspectival for each fold, perception becomes total and simultaneous” (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 252, MacCormack). Cthulhu’s Otherness in his vastly different nature is what causes the becoming-imperceptible in the crew-men, where Cthulhu “is the ultimate Door providing a way out for them” from their possessed human mind. Confronted with Cthulhu, a figure for Otherness, they either accept him in his “total and simultaneous” nature, or they begin “bogging down, or veering into the void,” becoming mad (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 251). While most of the crew-men die or go mad, the choice for Otherness is prompted nonetheless. However, while Cthulhu challenges categories of perception, another of Lovecraft’s stories challenges the category of the self.

Lovecraft’s “Through the Gate of the Silver Key” reveals a philosophy of becoming-infinite where one envisions the Other and the self in a simultaneity, equating the two as potentially the same and thus counteracting an apprehension against Otherness. In this story, protagonist Randolph Carter holds a mysterious silver key on an ill-defined mission. With an

⁷ Deleuze and MacCormack use “fold” as a similar term to “category.” Life and death are folds and categories. Cthulhu exists beyond them, but to be an eternal being beyond life and death is rarely thought of since humans themselves never exist beyond those two states. Cthulhu’s existence challenges them to think about such a non-categorical, simultaneous-fold state, which can be identified as a form of Otherness.

assumed curiosity for the unknown, Carter is able to invoke the key's true power, and through it can he traverse different time periods and different dimensions. Thus, he comes in direct contact with Otherness and it becomes imbued within him. At first, he travels through time and space, where he sees a "little boy named Randolph Carter" from 1883 but then sees "a vague shadow not less Randolph Carter," sitting "in the unknown and formless cosmic abyss beyond the Ultimate Gate" (529). These are Carter's past and future selves, yet he also begins to see Carters in "every known and suspected age of earth's history" in forms of "human and non-human, vertebrate and invertebrate, conscious and mindless, animal and vegetable" (530). From "world to world, universe to universe," these Carters are "all equally himself" (530). He even notes how each small decision alters who each of these Carters become in their own timelines. This omniscient awareness Carter receives is a becoming-infinite, where he is transformed by a loss of individuality and instead equivalates himself with an infinite number of other Carters and other beings which (through minute decisions in their own timelines) could end up as any equivalent Carter. This vision is a metaphor for accepting Otherness and thus merges Carter's self with every nonself, placing no Other above or below him or as friend or enemy: He now realizes he is a "multiplicity" of one, "a legion of selves" (530). He does not see others as a "characteristic or a certain number of characteristics" anymore, but as full, embodied selves just as he is (Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* 239). This philosophy of equivalence that Lovecraft expresses rectifies Otherness as it eradicates the concept of the Other as a whole, leaving only beings or things equal to one's own. Carter learns that "one is no longer a definite being distinguished from other beings;" therefore, the Other becomes just as worthy of acceptance and consideration as oneself (530). This collapses all borders between the self and the

Other, identifying the culprit of apprehension towards the Other as not their difference but how we let that difference alienate them. Despite this schizophrenic-like philosophy, Lovecraft and Deleuze prefer it over its rigid counterpart.

Under the Deleuzian concepts of paranoia and schizophrenia, Carter's character becomes a model for confronting and accepting Otherness and how doing so invokes fear for one's identity. Just as Dagon's and Pickman's paintings' interspecies nature, Cthulhu's and R'lyeh's impossible physical structure, and Cthulhu's incomprehensible language, Carter's achieving of infinite selves goes against the normative human experience. Thus as all the others do, Carter's becoming-infinite comes with unbearable fear as he "reeled in the clutch of supreme horror" (530). This is because such fear stems from a Deleuzian transformation from "paranoia" to "schizophrenia" as it relates to one's identity described in *Anti-Oedipus*. These concepts, which are philosophical metaphors, not the mental illnesses, describe perceptions of one's identity. Those with paranoia have an urge to "reterritorialize" everything to align with their identity and, thus, disregard or reject Otherness. On the other hand, schizophrenia, or schizo-madness, refers to "a whole scouring of the unconscious," acceptance of other identities, beings, and one's simultaneous place among them (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 299). This makes schizophrenia a "process of deterritorialization," the exact function of Lovecraft's stories for the characters and the reader: the attempt to confront the Other as its own individual, and hopefully to accept it (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 299). Being "infinite phases of that same archetypal and eternal being," Carter achieves such a schizo-madness but with a "lost individuality which had at first so horrified him" (534). This lost individuality is what frightens Carter initially and the fear signifies a paranoiac resistance. Characters who attempt to preserve

their paranoiac identity fall to a painful madness in Lovecraft's stories, as seen in "Dagon" and "The Call of Cthulhu", where the "peaceful oblivion" of "merging with nothingness" is desired over merging with Otherness (530). However, as seen with Dagon's existence, Pickman's paintings which mirror life, Cthulhu's eternal being, and now Carter's infinite self-perception, we see that the annihilation of the self—and all its rigidity of categorical thought—is the truest visage of reality. Thus, accepting the Other affirms a "pure existence," one outside the human biases and prejudices against Otherness that characterize a paranoiac sense of identity (MacCormack).

Lovecraft's collection of cosmic horror stories forms a seminal working ground for human acceptance of anything Other—other groups of people, animals, ideas, philosophies, social structures, and more—without the adherence to a human predisposition. Whether it's the inklings of anthropocentrism, a reliance on taxonomy, the basis of scientific laws, or the unwillingness to let go of a self-centered identity, Lovecraft's stories oppose all man-made categorical divisions of the world and defamiliarize the self. It becomes apparent that it is not Otherness that Lovecraft is trying to caution the reader from but the mind's preeminent biases against it. Thus, despite Houellebecq's famous statement that Lovecraft is "against life," Deleuze and similar scholars reveal more aptly that he is instead against the human. In doing so, he provides a philosophical template for confronting and accepting Otherness: letting go of all and any prior disregard for Otherness, no matter how uncomfortable. With a continuous aesthetic aim to overwhelm the characters and the reader with incontrovertible proof of otherworldly and inhuman monsters, the reader goes through their own anti-human becoming. A window into

Otherness unveils the monster as none other than the self, and the horror to change this is the only monster we are meant to conquer.

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