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怪誕「美」學：以物件導向本體論析論洛夫克拉夫特

小說中的美學

Weird Aesthetics: An Object-Oriented Approach to the

Aesthetics in H. P. Lovecraft's Fictions

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夫特小說中的美學

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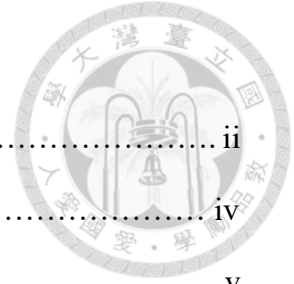
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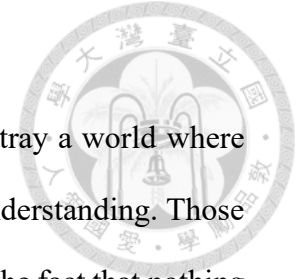
林宛瑄

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Acknowledgment

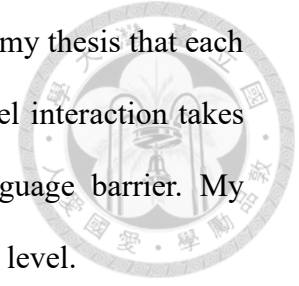


The primary texts, H. P. Lovecraft's fictions, in my thesis portray a world where everyone is entangled with weird objects that are beyond human understanding. Those monstrous beings reveal mankind's insignificance to the world and the fact that nothing is completely independent of other entities. Each person is constantly having interaction with things around us at the ontological level even though it is impossible to have a full understanding of the other. The completion of my arguments still involves something that cannot be solved at short notice. Overall, I would like to show my sincere gratitude to my advisor Professor Yung-Chao Liao. His infinite patience over my obscure ideas and immature writing helps me clarify my ideas in this thesis. I really appreciate his tenderness and the instant emotional support when my mind was beneath the shadows. Also, I am grateful to my committee members, Professor Nainu Yang and Professor Wan-Hsuan Lin. Professor Yang's discerning feedback and affirmative encouragement remove my disturbance during my frustration in writing. I also appreciate Professor Lin's careful reading and sharp questions which lead me to reexamine the essence of my thesis.


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Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my parents. My parents always support my decision to make effort in the literary analysis even if they cannot even read a word in

this thesis. Their love and support best prove the main argument in my thesis that each entity forever withdraws from the other but at the ontological level interaction takes place. Their love for me goes across the boundary of the language barrier. My attachment always makes contact with my family at the ontological level.



Chinese Abstract



本論文旨在從物件導向本體論的角度，探討洛夫克拉夫特作品中的美學。哈曼的理論著重於探討存在每個物之中的四個象限，並提出不僅僅存在於兩個個體間，每個物的內部也存在一個根本的斷裂。而隱喻則是唯一可以間接靠近物本體的管道。然而，哈曼的論述無法充分解釋洛夫克拉夫特的本體論，因為在本體層次並不存在一個根本的斷裂。洛夫克拉夫特作品中的物確實和其他物產生接觸。相較於哈曼的框架，夏維羅的思辨美學更重視本體層次的動力學，他認為每個物的本身會不斷地消滅，因為物的內部會持續地變動，但在本體層面，兩個個體間的互動仍會產生。夏維爾主張有一種美學能量平等地存在每個物之中，但是洛夫克拉夫特作品中物的詭異特質，展現的是超越人類理解範疇，屬於物的本體論。詭異的外型和相互抵觸的特質會在同一個物上顯現，它們怪異的存在形式撼動人類對外環境的認知。此外，洛夫克拉夫特的本體論暗示的是一股普遍存在每個物之中但有特殊先決條件的美學能力。透過特定的中介方式，它們顯示造成因果關係的先決條件並沒有固定規則的。洛夫克拉夫特的宇宙觀不只揭示夏維爾論述中，在本體層面，每個物皆持有的美學能量，也補足夏維爾的美學式因果關係論述之不足。洛夫克拉夫特的本體論與夏維爾的思辨美學兩者間理論的類似性與差異性，透過洛夫克拉夫特作品中的物明確地顯露出來，其物所透露的互動前的詭異先決條件，亦增進了洛夫克拉夫特本體論的詭譎性。

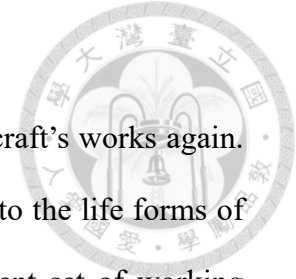
關鍵字：洛夫克拉夫特、史蒂芬·夏維羅、物件導向本體論、思辨美學

Abstract

This thesis aims to explore the aesthetics in H. P. Lovecraft's works from the perspective of object-oriented ontology. Harman's quadruple object emphasizes the four extremes within each object. He argues that there is a fundamental fracture not only between two entities but within each object as well. Metaphor is the only way to indirectly access the reality of the object. However, Harman's philosophy cannot completely explain Lovecraft's ontology because there is not a fundamental fracture at the ontological level. In the stories, Lovecraftian things still make contact with other objects. Contrary to Harman's philosophy, Shaviri's speculative aesthetics pays more attention to the dynamics of objects at the ontological level. He suggests that objects will perpetually perish because they are constantly changing. At the ontological level, contact between two entities still occurs. Shaviri proposes that there is a democratic aesthetic force that fairly exists in each object. Yet, the weird characteristics of Lovecraftian things show the ontology of objects, which is beyond human knowledge. They are weird in shape, and paradoxical features will appear on a single entity. Their weird presence challenges the observer's understanding of the world. Moreover, Lovecraftian things require a specific precondition before contact. Lovecraft's ontology indicates that there is an aesthetic capacity for each object at the ontological level. Through a specific mediation, they show an irregular precondition of causality. Objects in Lovecraft's universe not only demonstrate Shaviri's suggestion of a democratic force within each object at the ontological level but also supplement Shaviri's presupposition of aesthetic causality. Lovecraftian things reveal the affinity and difference between Lovecraft's ontology and Shaviri's speculative aesthetics. Their precondition before contact enhances the weirdness of Lovecraft's ontology.

Keywords: H. P. Lovecraft, Steven Shaviri, Object-oriented ontology, Speculative Aesthetics

Introduction

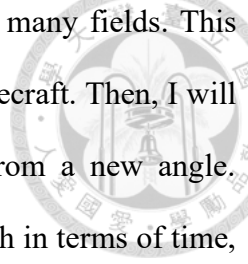


In the past two decades, scholars paid their attention to Lovecraft's works again. The strange objects and creatures in Lovecraft's works are related to the life forms of extraterrestrial beings, which are closely associated with a different set of working systems of objects. The rise of object-oriented ontology¹ after the twenty-first century draws our attention back to the perspective of the object, which provides a different angle to discuss those strange beings. In my opinion, the importance of object-oriented ontology lies in its emphasis on the issue of aesthetics. Graham Harman pays attention to the quadruple structure within each object and considers aesthetics to be the only solution to access the forever withdrawn real objects indirectly. Contra Harman, Steven Shaviro presupposes an ontological aesthetic condition in the objects, which he believes to be the cause of the causal relationship of everything.² From the perspective of object-oriented ontology, I try to elaborate on the ontology of those extraterrestrial beings and decipher the causal relationship of the object from a non-anthropocentric perspective. To display the aesthetic structure of the Lovecraftian things, Shaviro's perspective of speculative aesthetics³ provides a different angle to analyze the aesthetic structure of Lovecraft's works. How does aesthetics work in the Lovecraftian universe? How does aesthetics serve as a solution to the forever withdrawn objects in Harman's theory? And what's the difference between Lovecraftian ontology and Shaviro's speculative aesthetics? This thesis aims to answer the questions stated above from the aspect of object-oriented ontology.

¹ I will discuss the development of object-oriented ontology in the methodology section.

² Harman's and Shaviro's theoretical frameworks will be clarified in the literature review section.

³ In *The Universe of Things: On Speculative Realism*, Shaviro first proposed this concept on page 156. Speculative aesthetics seeks to construct an aesthetic framework in which aesthetic effect is the fundamental condition to all causalities between objects even though the reality of aesthetic feeling itself cannot be exhausted. More details about speculative aesthetics will be discussed in the first chapter.



In tradition, studies concerning Lovecraft have diverged into many fields. This review will briefly introduce the traditional aspects to interpret Lovecraft. Then, I will move on to the new philosophical school to revisit Lovecraft from a new angle. Traditional studies can be divided into biographical reading, research in terms of time, mathematic language in Lovecraft's texts, and philosophical reading concerning aesthetics. To start with, S. T. Joshi, an expert on the biographical study of Lovecraft and one of the most famous Lovecraft scholars, publishes several editions of Lovecraft's productions, letters, and essays. Joshi points out that Lovecraft's underlying principles of "cosmicism" have already shown up in his famous essay "Supernatural Horror in Literature"—"the suggestion of the vast gulfs of space and time and the consequent triviality of the human race" (Joshi 14).⁴ According to Joshi's analysis, "the importance of "atmosphere" ... [and] the cosmic point of view" (Joshi 15)⁵ are the basic elements of weird literature in Lovecraft's perspective, which also become the fundamental features of his works. In addition to the cosmic point of view, Lovecraft holds a negative attitude toward the progress of science. This pessimistic belief turns out to be a significant source for Lovecraft to shape his view of cosmic horror. In "Time, Space, and Natural Law: Science and Pseudo-Science in Lovecraft," Joshi states that "it [science] is largely used as a makeshift to enhance the *aesthetic* plausibility of the scenarios, which remain overwhelmingly supernatural in their overall thrust" (182). The scientific elements in Lovecraft's early writing emphasize the finitude of human science which cannot exhaust the working system of extraterrestrial beings. Through those scientific settings in the stories, Joshi believes that Lovecraft stressed the concept that

⁴ Excerpted from Joshi's introduction to Lovecraft's *The Annotated Supernatural Horror of Literature Revised and Enlarged*.

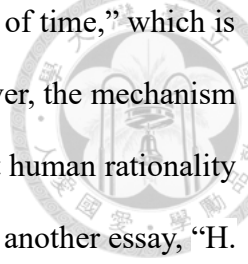
⁵ Excerpted from Joshi's introduction to Lovecraft's *The Annotated Supernatural Horror of Literature Revised and Enlarged*.

“there are not merely isolated non-human—or not fully human—entities lurking in hidden places, but entire civilizations of which we know nothing” (181).

The scientific investigation in Lovecraft’s works not only highlights the unanalyzable nature of those extraterrestrial creatures but also implies the powerlessness of humans. In “Beyond the Mountains of Madness: Lovecraftian Cosmic Horror and Posthuman Creationism in Ridley Scott’s *Prometheus* (2012),” David McWilliam points out that “scientific advances do not offer the prospect of a progressive future but risk revealing our insignificance and powerlessness on a cosmic scale” (531). McWilliam believes Ridley Scott’s *Prometheus* bears several similarities to Lovecraft’s setting in *At the Mountains of Madness*. The former reveals the insignificance of humans which is “simply unwanted, accidental creations to them [the Engineers]” (532); the latter dethrones humans from the mastery of everything through the discovery of the Old Ones in the Antarctic. In Lovecraft’s works, the encounter with extraterrestrial creatures reveals the deconstruction of the anthropocentric viewpoint. Compared with other kinds of life forms that might be more powerful and older than humanity, human is trivialized. Moreover, the element of time discloses the inability of humans. Kurt Fawver argues that:

The anthropocentric perception of time in Lovecraft's work, therefore, arises due to humanity’s need to maintain hope and a sense of purpose in a hopeless and purposeless cosmos. Assured safety and peace of mind grows only from a regime of ignorance—in this particular instance, ignorance of time’s ultimate nature (253).

In other words, the existence of time in Lovecraft serves as a defense “that numbs humanity to its inevitable end and makes life bearable” (251) since “both the past and the future is directed toward humanity's assured doom” (250). Fawver suggests that the concept of time is completely human-constructed in Lovecraft’s works. That is to say, in Lovecraft’s philosophy, there are two sets of time concepts. One refers to the human-

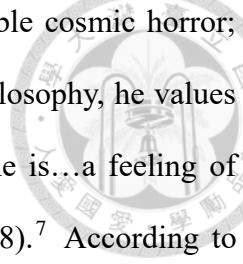


constructed concept of time; the other points to “the ultimate nature of time,” which is the natural system of those creatures from space. According to Fawver, the mechanism of the anthropocentric concept of time serves as a defense to protect human rationality since the ultimate nature of time is beyond human understanding. In another essay, “H. P. Lovecraft: a horror in higher dimensions” Thomas Hull argues that “mathematics helps to shape the mood of “cosmic horror”” (12) in Lovecraft’s texts. As a response to the criticism⁶ toward those Cthulhu monsters, Hull mentions that Lovecraft consciously uses mathematical language to describe the non-human geometric system of those extraterrestrial beings. He suggests “no literary critics discuss how such mathematics helps shape the mood of ‘cosmic horror’ for which Lovecraft is famous” (12). Through utilizing mathematical concepts, Lovecraft gets to describe the non-human geometry that man cannot understand and successfully shapes the sense of cosmic horror.

In addition to the research directions that I have mentioned above, some scholars emphasize the issue of aesthetics. In ““Cosmic Horror” and the Question of the Sublime in Lovecraft,” Ralickas proposes that Lovecraft’s novel reveals “a collapse of signification that amounts to an implicit subversion of the sublime,” (365) which Ralickas contends as “a subjective crisis specific to the modern condition” (366). She defines the cosmic horror in Lovecraft as follow:

—that fear and awe we feel when confronted by phenomena beyond our comprehension, whose scope extends beyond the narrow field of human affairs and boasts of cosmic significance—compels the expansion of the experiencing subject’s imagination (364).

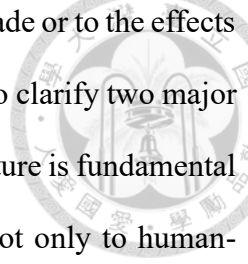
⁶ In one of Lovecraft’s letters in 1932, he clearly stated that due to some mathematical concepts he utilized in the stories, “the *concrete* and *tangible* nature of some of my ‘cosmic horrors’” (qtd. Hull 10) is strongly criticized by his contemporaries.



In other words, Lovecraft's characters are subject to the unknowable cosmic horror; therefore, they are experiencing the Kantian sublime. In Kant's philosophy, he values the operation of the faculty of reason. "The feeling of the sublime is...a feeling of displeasure, arising from the inadequacy of imagination" (Kant 88).⁷ According to Kant, the experience of the sublime always arouses a sense of unpleasantness. The experience of the sublime threatens the subject's rationality. The faculty of mind serves as the last defense for the subject. However, most of Lovecraft's characters go beyond the limit. The encounter with cosmic horror defeats their rationality. Thus, most of them end up going crazy or committing suicide. In general, scholars make textual analysis to Lovecraft's texts and focus on the anthropocentric dimension. Joshi's biographical research reveals the contemporary events that affect Lovecraft's attitude toward weird literature. Mc William, Fawver, and Hull point out the trivialized humanity in Lovecraft's texts. Ralickas analyzes the aesthetic domain from the perspective of Kant. However, the underlying principle in Lovecraft's works remains unrevealed until Harman applies a new theory to probe in Lovecraft's philosophy.

Recently, scholars started to analyze Lovecraft from the perspective of object-oriented ontology. In the 1990s Graham Harman proposed the concept of object-oriented philosophy. The concept of object-oriented ontology (often abbreviated as OOO and pronounced as triple O) originates from Graham Harman's dissertation *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*. The movement of object-oriented ontology aims to reject the philosophical movement of correlationism. The OOO scholars value the issue of the ontological status of nonhuman objects. In *Tool-Being* Harman argues that "Heidegger's account of equipment gives birth to an ontology of *object themselves*" (1), which implies a new theory of everything. For OOO, an object

⁷ Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgment*. Translated by James Creed Meredith. Oxford UP, 2007. This book will be cited as *CJ* in this research.



“cannot be entirely reduced either to the components of which it is made or to the effects that it has on other things” (*OOO* 43).⁸ Harman’s philosophy aims to clarify two major claims. First, referred to Heidegger’s tool analysis, the fourfold structure is fundamental to all entities. Second, the rule of causality should be applicable not only to human-object relationships but to the object-object relationships. The quadruple structure within each object includes the four extremes: sensual object, sensual quality, real object, and real quality. Take an apple as an example. An apple as a sensual object means the image of an apple captured in our consciousness. The sensual qualities of an apple refer to the qualities we perceive of an apple, such as redness, and sweetness. The real apple points to what defines an apple as an apple regardless of human perception. Last, the real qualities of an apple are the real properties of an apple which are not relevant to the sensual qualities based on human perception. In *The Quadruple Object*⁹ Harman clearly defines the four poles and the interplay of them. Harman believes Husserl’s intentional object¹⁰ shows us the gulf “between their accidents and their essential qualities” (21), while Heidegger gives us the real object and its tension with its sensual qualities and real qualities. It must be clarified that the four poles are united within each entity and “both real and sensual objects are polarized with two different kinds of qualities” (48). The sensual objects and sensual qualities only exist in the phenomenal while the real objects and real qualities exist in the real. Furthermore, Harman believes that there is a fundamental gulf between the real object and the sensual object. This intrinsic fracture cannot be conquered by any possibilities. We can only touch the real object indirectly through allusion. Harman states that Heidegger’s fourfold structure

⁸ Harman, Graham. *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything*. Penguin, 2018. In the rest of this thesis, this book will be cited as *OOO*.

⁹ Harman, Graham. *The Quadruple Object*. Zero Books, 2011. This book will be cited as *QO* in the following text.

¹⁰ Husserl’s intentional object can briefly refer to all the sensual objects in human consciousness.

talks about “four separate kinds of them [objects]” (*QO* 91). Yet, his new fourfold shifts its focus to the tension within a single object.

The tensions between the four extremes are *time*, *space*, *essence*, and *eidōs*. Time stands for the “tension between sensual objects and their sensual qualities” (*QO* 100). “Space is the tension between concealed real objects and the sensual qualities associated with them” (*QO* 100). Essence “concerns the real qualities that belong to a real thing” (*OOO* 159). Last, *eidōs*, borrowing Plato’s term for his perfect forms, is defined as the “indispensable real qualities” (*OOO* 159) of sensual objects.¹¹ The new quadruple structure aims to clarify the interplay of the four poles. Moreover, Harman presumes that there is a fundamental fracture between the sensual realm and the real realm. Harman argues that:

The gap between the invisible intentional object and its palpable sensual profiles is not the only rift in the world. There is also a gap between intentional objects and real ones, since the target of an intentional act is not itself the object to which it refers. (*GM* 77)¹²

The real—neither internal to an object nor external to another entity—cannot be accessed completely. To conquer this absolute gap, Harman believes a good metaphor helps us to experience an entity without really touching the object itself, which he terms as “vicarious causation” (*OOO* 151). He defines that “any philosophy that makes an absolute distinction between substances and relations will inevitably become a theory of vicarious causation, since there will be no way for the substances to interact directly with one another” (*GM* 2). Since no object can fully exhaust the reality of another one, vicarious causation becomes the character of all causation of objects. For Harman, as

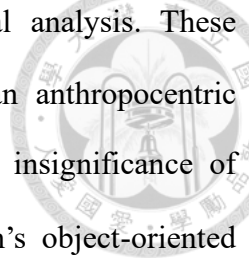
¹¹ The interplay of the four poles will be discussed in detail in the first chapter.

¹² Harman, Graham. *Guerrilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things*. Open Court, 2011. This book will be cited as *GM* in the following paragraph.

long as the gulf within objects remains absolute, aesthetics is the only way to bring a real object into causality. Allure is the term for “the fusion of withdrawn real objects with accessible surface qualities” (*QO* 104). Allusion is a way of pointing “toward a thing without making it present” (*WR* 238).¹³ Due to the intrinsic fracture within each entity, allusion becomes the only measure for us to get a glimpse of the real object while not accessing to its reality.

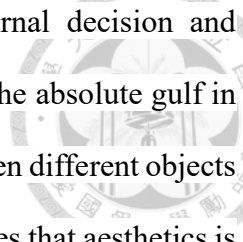
Under the premise, Harman deciphers Lovecraft’s philosophy from OOO’s perspective of aesthetics. He addresses Lovecraft as a *productionist* who in his opinion “find[s] new gaps in the world where there were formerly none” (*WR* 3). Harman believes that literal translation cannot be the proper way to decode the ontology of an object because “reality is not made of statements” (*WR* 14). Yet, “the inability to make the things-in-themselves directly present does not forbid us from having *indirect* access to them ... just as Lovecraft can allude to the physical form of Cthulhu even while canceling the literal terms of the description” (*WR* 17). Harman sees something in Lovecraft that elaborates the dynamics of the fourfold structure OOO proposed. Lovecraft’s writing style reveals the aesthetic effect of those unknown objects which gradually transforms people and objects on earth into something beyond human recognition. Rather than presenting the monsters in realistic terms, Lovecraft’s equivocal writing creates the horror of the extraterrestrial being. Harman believes that Lovecraft is aware of the limitation of literal description. Therefore, he tries his best to avoid the cliché created by paraphrasing the reality of objects. He is good at “making the unnamable seem horrible by telling us it is even worse than something we already know without fearing in the least” (*WR* 63).

¹³ Harman, Graham. *Weird Realism: Lovecraft and Philosophy*. Zero Books, 2012. This book will be cited as *WR* in the rest of this thesis.



Generally, traditional Lovecraftian studies focus on textual analysis. These traditional interpretations of Cthulhu monsters are trapped in an anthropocentric perspective, which is the opposite of Lovecraft's purpose—the insignificance of humans in the universe. Yet, the emergence of Graham Harman's object-oriented philosophy provides a different angle to analyze Lovecraft's philosophy. Harman emphasizes decoding the dynamics of the four poles within each entity and the aesthetic effect the quadruple structure creates. But Harman's presupposition of the absolute gulf restricts the possibility of discussing the interplay in the real realm which makes his discussion simply focus on the aesthetic effects in the sensual realm. The dynamics in the real realm remain untouched. In Harman's philosophy, there is a fundamental fracture within each object, which can only be indirectly accessed by metaphor. However, in Lovecraft's stories, the causal relationship between earthly objects and Lovecraftian things still occurs. There is not a fundamental fracture that prevents the causal relationship from happening. As a result, this thesis tries to investigate the dynamics at the ontological level through Shaviro's speculative aesthetics. Steven Shaviro holds a different attitude on the issue of aesthetics in OOO. In *The Universe of Things: On Speculative Realism*,¹⁴ he presumes an ontological aesthetic force in the object which seduces the other object to take in the sensual existence of itself and thus implants itself into another being. Shaviro's ontology inherits Whitehead's philosophical thinking. He values Whitehead's viewpoint to treat "the universe as a finely articulated plenum" (*UT* 39). According to Shaviro, Whitehead's concept of "perpetually perish" meets with Harman's presupposition that objects will forever withdraw. Since the object will perish, the object in the next second is not the same one. Therefore, "no entity canprehend another entity in its fullness" (*UT* 36). Moreover,

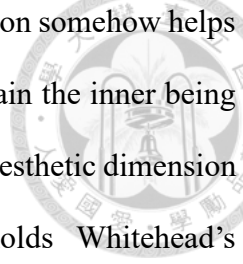
¹⁴ Shaviro, Steven. *The Universe of Things: On Speculative Realism*. Minnesota UP, 2014. This book will be cited as *UT* in this thesis.



Shaviro suggests that Whitehead's philosophy values "both internal decision and external relation" (UT 40), which departs from Harman's belief of the absolute gulf in the object. The interplay within each entity and the interaction between different objects are both important in Shaviro's ontology. Furthermore, Shaviro argues that aesthetics is the presumption of everything: "aesthetics involves feeling an object for its own sake, beyond those aspects of it that can be understood or used" (UT 53). As Shaviro suggests, "perception, feeling and aesthetics are universal structure, not specifically human ones" since aesthetics is "a mode of contact" (UT 61). In Shaviro's philosophy, both human and nonhuman entities can feel other entities. He emphasizes that each entity has its own perspective of the world. However, objects are constantly changing in themselves, which makes it impossible to be completely exhausted. Even though we cannot decipher the reality of feeling itself, the experience simply is. Shaviro's speculative aesthetics focuses on the issue of aesthetics which is "the realm of immanent, noncognitive contact" (UT 148). First, in Shaviro's definition, aesthetic causality refers to the effect of allusion, just as Harman argued. Second, this vicarious¹⁵ interaction takes place regardless of human perception and involves the mechanism of real force. That is to say, causality is triggered by the real force within objects. Therefore, he considers aesthetics to be the solution to the problem of the absolute gap.

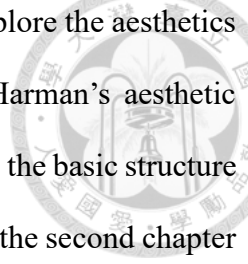
There is an interesting relationship between ontology and aesthetics. In Harman's argument, there is not only a discrepancy between our understanding of the object and the reality of the object but there is a fundamental fracture even between objects themselves. Even though Harman argues that all causalities take place in the sensual realm, the ontological realm of objects remains a myth. This gulf can only be partially accessed by metaphor. Contra Harman, Shaviro states that aesthetics is the

¹⁵ In *The Universe of Things*, Shaviro used vicarious and aesthetic interchangeably.



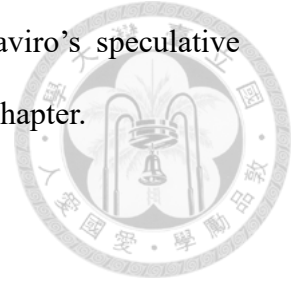
presupposition of causalities. Shaviro agrees with Harman that allusion somehow helps to get a glimpse of thing-in-itself, and yet “it can never actually attain the inner being of those other entities” (UT91). In Shaviro’s framework, there is an aesthetic dimension at the ontological level of every entity. Since Shaviro upholds Whitehead’s philosophical view of being, he emphasizes the dynamic process of how each entity remains the same despite the incidents that bump into it. Even though it looks the same, the internal composition of the object keeps changing. In total, Harman and Shaviro both agree that there is a black hole within each object which cannot be fully accessed by any measure. Harman suggests allure is the only way to access the real object indirectly while Shaviro presupposes an aesthetic ontological lure in each entity. Even though it is impossible to decipher thing-in-itself, it does not matter for experience to take place. Shaviro’s suggestion on the ontological perspective of aesthetics implies more possibilities to analyze the aesthetics of Lovecraft. Rather than proposing a vacuum ontological status in an object like Harman, Shaviro chooses to embrace our limitations in recognizing the reality of things and emphasizes an immanent aesthetic effect.

This thesis explores Lovecraft’s novellas from the perspective of object-oriented ontology. Lovecraft’s ontology shows a universe of objects which demonstrates the weird working system of objects. Even though objects in Lovecraft’s writing indicate an ontology that is beyond human understanding, the causal relationship still takes place. Therefore, Shaviro’s speculative aesthetics, which explores the dynamics of objects at the ontological level, will be suitable to analyze Lovecraft’s ontology. In this thesis, I will investigate the similarities between Lovecraft’s ontology and Shaviro’s speculative aesthetics. The difference in the dynamical structure of Lovecraft’s ontology will also be clarified in this thesis. The first chapter “**Toward a Lovecraftian Aesthetic Theory of Object-Oriented Ontology**” will deal with the theoretical framework for this thesis.



I will trace the history of aesthetics back to western tradition and explore the aesthetics in OOO and the divergent issues OOO scholars try to discuss. Harman's aesthetic framework of OOO and Shaviro's speculative aesthetics will serve as the basic structure in my discussion of those unnamable objects in Lovecraft's texts. In the second chapter "**The Weird Aesthetic Ontology of the Lovecraftian Things,**" I will try to decipher the weird ontology of Lovecraftian things. I will focus on analyzing the ontology of those artistic objects, such as the Cthulhu idol in *The Call of Cthulhu*, the cyclopean city in *At the Mountains of Madness*, the tiara in *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, etc. Basically, I will focus on the three significant characteristics of Lovecraftian things— weird shapes, paradoxical features, and their weird presence. Shaviro's speculative aesthetics will be adopted to discuss the ontological structure of Lovecraftian things. In the third chapter "**The Aesthetic Causality of objects in Lovecraft's Universe,**" I will compare Lovecraft's ontology to Shaviro's speculative aesthetics. I will closely analyze the scenes of mirage in *At the Mountains of Madness* and the color that comes with the meteorite in *The Colour out of Space* to explicate the causal relationship of the Cthulhu objects. Moreover, I will explore the issue of miscegenation and degeneration in Lovecraft's writing because the two issues concern the ontological movement within them. By employing Shaviro's speculative aesthetics, I would like to point out the affinities and differences between Lovecraft's ontology and Shaviro's framework. Even though aesthetic causality exists in Lovecraftian things, they have the ability to make a response to causality in a way that is completely unpredictable, regardless of human will. Through analyzing Lovecraft's ontology, I try to clarify the ontological aesthetic working system of Lovecraftian things and figure out the similarities and discrepancies between Shaviro's framework and Lovecraft's philosophy. In object-oriented philosophy, aesthetics is the fundamental element that gives rise to causality. This thesis will start with a brief review of the history of aesthetics and will move on to analyze

the theoretical framework, Harman's quadruple objects, and Shaviro's speculative aesthetics. Lovecraft's weird aesthetic will be explored in the next chapter.



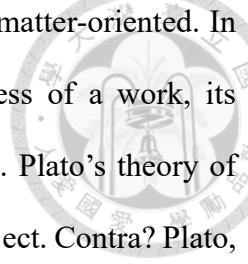
Chapter One

Toward a Lovecraftian Aesthetic Theory of Object-Oriented Ontology



In its long history, the issue of aesthetics has made its figure since ancient Greece. Western philosophers explore the history and development of aesthetics from various angles. In this chapter, I will discuss the various theories of aesthetics from the western tradition, especially Plato's and Aristotle's framework, to the modern viewpoint, such as Immanuel Kant's philosophy of the sublime.¹⁶ Lovecraft's attitude toward aesthetics will be clarified from the letters and other significant essays Lovecraft published. His philosophy of cosmicism definitely concerns a different mode of the aesthetic system which not only inspires several significant writers in modern times but also affects how the theorists construct their view of the world. Among the divergent schools of literary critics, object-oriented ontology (often abbreviated as OOO, pronounced as triple O) is strongly associated with the interplay of the four poles within each entity, and in OOO scholars' perspective the aesthetic approach serves as a crucial means to generate the causal relationship between everything. Therefore, the aesthetic frameworks OOO scholars proposed will serve as an important viewpoint to analyze Lovecraft's works. Moreover, a comparison of the two sets of aesthetics will be made in the last section of this chapter. Through the comparative analysis, the connection between Lovecraft and OOO will be clarified and strengthened.

¹⁶ This thesis focuses on the dynamics of aesthetics at the ontological level. Philosophers, such as Plato, Aristotle, and Kant, whose theories concern the ontology of the object, will be included in the literature review. I will briefly review the history of the ontology of aesthetics from ancient Greece to modern times. The theoretical framework, object-oriented ontology, originates from Graham Harman whose framework makes a difference in the definition of the ontology of objects. His theory inspires several philosophers whose theories explore the dynamics of aesthetics at the ontological level. Their frameworks of ontological aesthetics serve as an important angle to examine H. P. Lovecraft's stories in this research.



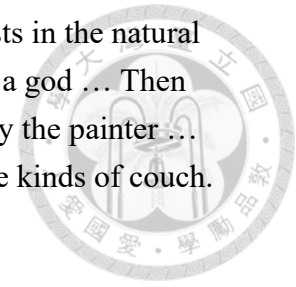
Basically, the research of aesthetics is either form-oriented or matter-oriented. In *Aesthetics*, Nicolai Hartmann argues that “the unity and wholeness of a work, its uniqueness and its self-containment depend entirely on form” (13). Plato’s theory of mimesis is one of the examples which emphasizes the form of the object. Contra? Plato, Aristotle’s hylomorphism explores both form and matter of the object. In his hylomorphism, “objects are compound consisting of matter and form” (Paramatzis 12).¹⁷ The existence of form is not independent of the object. As for the issue of the matter, Hartmann defines matter in a broad sense as “everything that is indeterminate and undifferentiated in itself, so far as it is capable of receiving from form—all the way down to the bare dimensions of space and time” (14). According to Hartmann, the connection between form and matter shapes different kinds of art forms. The fundamental issue concerning the inquiry of art depends on the observer “since the beautiful is essentially directed toward a beholding subject” (9). That is, in addition to the art form itself, the observer plays a significant role in aesthetic analysis because the judgment of beauty counts on subjective determination which is a fact that cannot be denied. Theories that concern ontological communication refer to matter-oriented aesthetics, such as the theories of North Whitehead, Gilles Deleuze, and Steven Shaviro. Inspired by Whitehead’s philosophy, Steven Shaviro’s proposes the concept of speculative aesthetics. He emphasizes the ontological changes of each entity. For him, causalities happen at the ontological level before it is recognized by another entity.¹⁸

To begin with, in *The Republic Book X*, Plato’s theory of mimesis expresses his perspective on the issue of art. He takes the bed as an example:

¹⁷ Paramatzis, Michail. “Aristotle’s Hylomorphism: The Causal-Explanatory Model.” *Metaphysics*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2018, pp. 12-32.

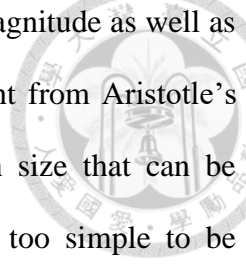
¹⁸ More details about the dynamics of speculative aesthetics will be explained in the latter section in this chapter.

We have these three sorts of couch. There's the one which exists in the natural order of things. This one, I imagine we'd say, was the work of a god ... Then there's one made by the carpenter ... And then the one made by the painter ... Painter, carpenter, god, then. Three agents responsible for three kinds of couch. (315-316)



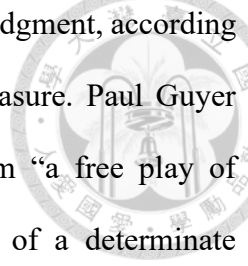
According to Plato's example, there are three kinds of forms of the bed. The genuine form of the bed only exists in the natural order which is the *real form* created by god. The one made by the craftsman is "something *like* the real thing, but not itself the real thing" (315). Last, the one made by the painter is merely an *imitator*. In other words, Plato's aesthetic framework explores three kinds of forms of the same object. The genuine form can only be created by god which has "an essential unique nature" (316) and will not change in any situation. The form made by the craftsman is something that looks like genuine form but is absolutely not what it truly is. The form made by the painter is simply an imitator of the carpenter's bed. Plato strongly criticizes the form created by the painter. He describes it as looking at the mirror and then you can easily create what you have seen. Based on Plato's description, every single entity has three kinds of forms and has different layers within itself. The genuine form refers to what defines the object as what it is. The two forms made by the carpenter and the painter are simply the two removed from the real form. It is obvious that Plato finds fault with the two forms that concern the sensual perception of human consciousness. Yet, the real form of the object remains the same all the time and can only be created by god.

As for Aristotle's framework, he holds a different perspective on the meaning of imitation. In *Poetics*, Aristotle defines tragedy as "an imitation of the complete, i.e. whole, action, possessing a certain magnitude" (13). He emphasizes the issue of "magnitude" which he believes to be the standard of beauty. Aristotle argues that no organism can be beautiful because "any beautiful object, whether a living organism or any other entity composed of parts, must not only possess those parts in proper order,



but its magnitude also should not be arbitrary; beauty consists in magnitude as well as order” (14). That is to say, the part-whole relationship is important from Aristotle’s point of view. Besides, a beautiful object should have a certain size that can be perceived by the observer, which cannot be too complicated or too simple to be understood by the observer. In other words, Aristotle pays attention to the balance of all the elements in each tragedy. They should follow a certain rule and most important of all, they must be intertwined with each other. To create a good tragedy, the imitation of the characters or events must be unified. The plots should be well-organized, the removal of any single plot would change the whole story. In short, Plato’s and Aristotle’s frameworks focus on the human perception of the environment. Plato’s theory of mimesis investigates the issue of forms including the underlying inaccessible form and the sensual forms perceived by the carpenter or the painter. Aristotle focuses on the inner harmony of an object. Both of their theories take human consciousness as the presumption. Contra Plato, Aristotle holds a different attitude toward the issue of form. Plato suggests there is a perfect form that exists outside time and space. It is unchangeable and cannot be created by mankind. However, Aristotle argues that form cannot exist without objects. In Aristotle’s philosophy, “objects are characterisable in terms of matter and form; or analysable into matter and form; or understood on the basis of matter and form” (Paramatzis 12).

After Plato and Aristotle, western philosophers raise several theories to discuss the issue of aesthetics. Plato’s idealism points to the objective form of objects while Kant’s aesthetic focuses on subjective judgment. In Kant’s philosophy, the world is divided into two levels—one can be observed and perceived by human consciousness; the other is completely out of human recognition. Moreover, the operation of the faculty of reason is the foundation of aesthetic judgment. How to classify the difference between beauty and the sublime is strongly associated with the faculty of the mind. In *Critique of*

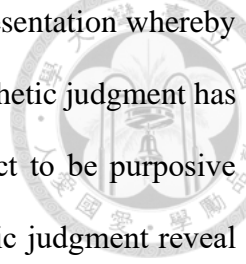


Judgment,¹⁹ Kant discusses the aesthetic issue in depth. Aesthetic judgment, according to Kant's argument, is strongly associated with the feeling of pleasure. Paul Guyer summarizes that the beautiful, in Kant's perspective, comes from "a free play of imagination and understanding rather than from the application of a determinate concept to the object, and that is why there is no precise rules for our judgment of taste: rules presuppose determinate concepts" (315).²⁰ That is to say, the experience of the beautiful involves the feeling of pleasure. Kant argues that judgment of beauty is "one whose determining ground *cannot be other than subjective*" (CJ 37). The judgment of the beautiful does not presuppose determinate concepts but follows four general principles. According to *The Kant Dictionary*,²¹ the first principle requires the object to be disinterested. That is "the distinction between being beautiful and being useful" (33). For example, the landscape is beautiful not because this landscape is useful for me. "The pleasure being disinterested is that one does not care about the existence of the object" (KD 34). In other words, the preference of a person does not serve as the standard of aesthetic judgment. The second and the third principles refer to the universality and necessity of the judgment of beauty. Aesthetic judgment "must involve a claim to validity for everyone, and must do so apart from a universality directed to objects" (CJ 43). In other words, the judgment of the beautiful expects the same response from everyone. "The pleasure felt by us is expected from everyone else as necessary" (CJ 49). Aesthetic judgment is a universal faculty. When people encounter other entities, they are capable of judging and always will judge. The universality and necessity of aesthetic judgment are "two features of any *a priori* judgment" (KD 37) that come from the human mind. Last, "the consciousness of mere formal purposiveness

¹⁹ Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgment*. Translated by James Creed Meredith. Oxford UP, 2007.

²⁰ Guyer, Paul. *Kant*. Routledge, 2006.

²¹ Thorpe, Lucas. *The Kant Dictionary*. Bloomsbury, 2015. This publication will be quoted as *KD*.

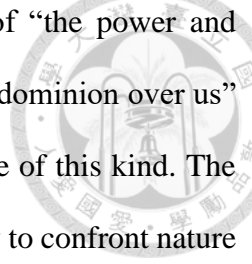


in the play of the cognitive faculties of the subject attending a representation whereby an object is given, is the pleasure itself” (*CJ* 53). That is to say, aesthetic judgment has no telos but merely a feeling that affects us. “We judge the object to be purposive without purpose” (*KD* 36). For Kant, the four principles of aesthetic judgment reveal the importance of the operation of the faculty of reason. Even though the judgment of beauty does not come from determinate concepts, the faculty of reason works to remind the subject of the harmonious pleasure that comes from aesthetic judgment.

Besides, Kant proposes the concept of the sublime to explain other functions of the rational faculty. He defines the sublime as:

A feeling of displeasure, arising from the inadequacy of imagination in the aesthetic estimation of magnitude to attain to its estimation by reason, and a simultaneously awakened pleasure, arising from this very judgement of the inadequacy of the greatest faculty of sense being in accord with ideas of reason, so far as the effort to attain to these is for us a law. (*CJ* 88)

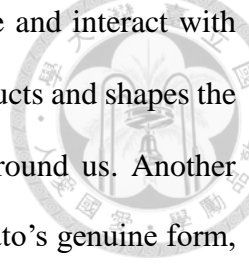
According to Kant, beauty is “a presentation of an indeterminate concept of the understanding” while the sublime refers to “a presentation of an indeterminate concept of reason” (*CJ* 75). The concept of natural beauty is associated with the limited *form* of understandable objects whereas the sublime makes the faculty of reason cease to work completely. There are two kinds of the sublime: the mathematical sublime and the dynamical sublime. The mathematical sublime is a “recognition of the incapacity of imagination gives us the feeling that there is more than the world of sense, for in a way such experiences transport us, at least in terms of feeling, into the intelligible realm” (*KD* 63). The infinite serves as a good example. The inadequacy of our imagination to estimate something *absolutely great* will lead to the mathematically sublime. The absolutely great is beyond human understanding; however, the faculty of reason reminds the subject of his own inadequacy to apprehend the noumena at the threshold



of the sublime. The dynamical sublime refers to an experience of “the power and terrifying force of nature, while recognizing that this power has no dominion over us” (KD 63). Nature serves as the best example to illustrate the sublime of this kind. The dynamical sublime makes us experience the fear of our insufficiency to confront nature but ends up knowing that it does no harm to us. The rational faculty works to prevent us from going across the gap which leads to the realm beyond human understanding. Based on the systematical division of the concepts of the beautiful and the sublime, it is obvious that Kant emphasizes the ability of logical thinking in human consciousness. The operation of human faculty is the core of aesthetic judgment. Besides, the dynamics of the sublime also expresses the importance of the operation of human faculty. Barbara Freeman argues that Kant’s theory of the sublime is “a system of encasement, injunction, and imperatives that function to protect the sublime from the monstrous inherent potential in it” (22).²² The faculty of reason serves as the last defense to protect the precarious mind at the edge of the sublime. It reminds the subject of his insignificance. “The sublime becomes what it is only by virtue of being distinguished from what it is not” (Freeman 22). Therefore, even though the noumena is completely negated in Kant’s philosophy, the faculty of reason still occupies a significant role during the experience of the sublime. The Kantian subject is entirely anchored in the phenomenal world. Yet, the interplay of things or the existence of objects in the noumena remains a myth in Kant’s framework.

Contra Kant, H. P. Lovecraft establishes a completely different framework concerning aesthetics. The aesthetic theories of the western tradition highly focus on the reality in human consciousness. Basically, the world is divided into two parts. The sensual realm can be perceived and interferes with man’s will. In this domain animals

²² Freeman, Barbara. “*Frankenstein* with Kant: A Theory of Monstrosity, or the Monstrosity of Theory.” *Substance*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1987.



and other nonhuman objects are deprived of the ability to perceive and interact with other entities. Most of the time a human is the only actor who constructs and shapes the phenomenal world through our knowledge of the other entities around us. Another realm that accommodates the genuine reality of things—such as Plato’s genuine form, Kant’s noumenal—refers to an inaccessible domain that humans cannot easily approach. In some cases, such as Kant’s noumenal, man has no chance to reach this realm. It is a field beyond human comprehension. Against the division between the phenomenal and the noumenal, Lovecraft provides a different angle to see the world. His contribution comes from his presupposition of an extraterrestrial system that is beyond human knowledge. He creates lots of creatures that come from “*the Outside*”²³ and demonstrates features that have never been known to mankind. However, being beyond human recognition does not entail that it is inferior and without discipline. Instead, things from the Outside show more potential to interact with other entities.

While Lovecraft was preparing for his celebrated treaty ‘Supernatural Horror in Literature,’ he gradually clarified the definition of Lovecraftian weird tales, which also included the fundamental elements of cosmicism. Primarily, Lovecraft’s weird stories deal with haunting encounters with beings from the Outside. What’s more, he makes lots of efforts to describe the surroundings in a realistic style. According to Lovecraft:

To achieve the essence of real externality, whether of time or space or dimension, one must forget that such things as organic life, good and evil, love and hate, and all such local attributes of a negligible and temporary race called mankind, have any existence at all. Only the human scenes and characters must have human qualities. *These* must be handled with unsparing *realism*, (*not catch-penny romanticism*) but when we cross the line to the boundless and hideous unknown—

²³ In Lovecraft’s stories, the strange things and different life forms that are beyond human knowledge come from the universe. Therefore, in this research, I will use the term “the Outside” to refer to the fictional creatures in Lovecraft’s writing.

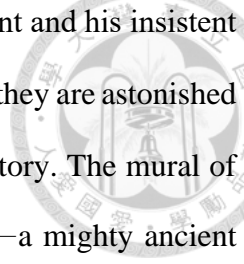
the shadow-haunted *Outside*—we must remember to leave our humanity—and terrestrialism at the threshold. (*SLII* 150)²⁴

That is to say, those realistic descriptions are created by Lovecraft on purpose. The dichotomy in Lovecraft's philosophy refers to the terrestrial and the unknown *Outside*. The description concerning human scenes must be realistic because in Lovecraft's perspective the phenomenal world is completely constructed within human experience. As a result, science becomes a perfect tool for him to set up the limited human understanding of the world. By making use of the deficiency in scientific knowledge and a realistic writing style, Lovecraft criticizes the finiteness of human knowledge and the dependence upon the anthropocentric viewpoint. The scientific elements reflect how humans decipher physical objects into parts; the realistic writing style shows the sensual recognition of the environment. Not only the human-centered viewpoint but the finiteness of the anthropocentric angle is included in Lovecraft's realistic descriptions.

Moreover, Lovecraft never misses his intention to shape his Cthulhu mythos in an anti-anthropocentric way. In one of his letters, he states it clearly that “a work of art must be true to human feeling, but it need not be at all ‘true’ to actual objective fact” (*SLIII* 22).²⁵ In other words, the judgment of artwork is a matter of human sensual determination. Art is a kind of transformation of human emotion, but it does not entail the reality of an object. Furthermore, the meaning of “true” is simply “the emotional demands of the average sense-gland-nerve system of average people — and these demands have no relation to the absolute facts of the universe” (*SLIII* 22). The interpretation of an artwork has to do with human emotion, whose act is never relevant to the reality of the object itself. The novella *At the Mountains of Madness* serves as the

²⁴ This paragraph was excerpted from Lovecraft, Howard Phillips. *Selected Letters 1925–1929*. Edited by August Derleth and Donald Wandrei, Arkham House, 1968. This publication will be quoted as *SLII* in the rest of this thesis.

²⁵ Lovecraft, Howard Phillips. *Selected Letters 1929–1931*. Edited by August Derleth and Donald Wandrei, Arkham House, 1971. This publication will be cited as *SLIII* in this research.



best example to reflect Lovecraft's attitude toward aesthetic judgment and his insistent on realistic description. When the scientists enter the cyclopean city, they are astonished to witness an unknown ancient civilization that is out of human history. The mural of the city "seems" to demonstrate the rise and fall of the Old Ones—a mighty ancient species from space. Based on the mural, the protagonists interpret their history from the human perspective. However, their interpretation simply makes sense to the human beings because they view the mural as an artwork. From the Old Ones' perspective, the mural may not play the same role as mankind has imagined. Lovecraft shapes his universe on the basis of his own weird aesthetics.

Another significant feature in Lovecraft's philosophy is the trivialization of mankind. This topic constantly shows up in Lovecraft's stories. Lovecraft shows his preference for fantasy—especially for Poe—since childhood. "The world and all its inhabitants impress me as immeasurable insignificant, so that I always crave imitations of larger and subtler symmetries these which concern mankind" (*SLII* 160). Lovecraft's personal preference for fantasy in one sense explains why his characters are prone to encountering things from the Outside. In another sense, Lovecraft is deeply influenced by contemporary scientific discoveries. According to Lovecraft's letters, Joshi suggests "an awareness of the many sciences—physics, biology, chemistry, astronomy, geology, paleontology—that could conceivably be drawn upon for the new kind of horror tale he [Lovecraft] was writing" (172).²⁶ As a result, Lovecraft's writing style is strongly influenced by the scientific knowledge he received in his youth:

It was exactly because the world revealed by science was, potentially, a world of mystery and even terror that he became enraptured with the sciences. Science was, certainly, a way of penetrating those mysteries, but there would always be further

²⁶ Joshi, S. T. "Time, Space, and Natural Law: Science and Pseudo-Science in Lovecraft." *Lovecraft Annual*, no. 4, 2010, pp. 171-201.

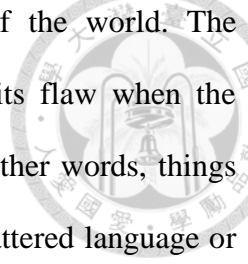
mysteries to be explored, and perhaps many that could never be fully explicated. (Joshi 173)²⁷

In other words, Lovecraft's monsters will not be deciphered by scientific investigation because science cannot reveal something outside human knowledge. His "monsters are the most purely nonhuman of any entity" (Joshi 27).²⁸ "Mankind is merely one type of matter among many, and no more to be loved or respected ... than any other type of matter" (*SLII* 165). For Lovecraft, mankind and all other kinds of matter stand on equal footing. "Why men are any more *essentially* offensive ... than trees, is something I can't possibly see" (*SLII* 165-166), which suggests that nonhuman entities share the same rule with mankind from his perspective. This attitude can be shown in the example in *The Colour out of Space*. In the story, the color that comes with the meteorite demonstrates a kind of life form that is out of human understanding. It has no physical form and will gradually "transform" things it contacts. In this case, the natural law from a human's perspective does not work anymore. This color from the Outside follows another general law that man cannot understand. Scientists can only examine what kinds of chemical reaction this meteorite will have with the materials from the earth. Another important feature that this mysterious thing revealed is that the things from the Outside do not remain the same all the time. Contra Plato's genuine form, which cannot be changed by any means, the thing that comes with the meteorite shows its flexibility toward different entities. From this case, it is clear that the inaccessible objects will change but follow a rule that mankind cannot comprehend.

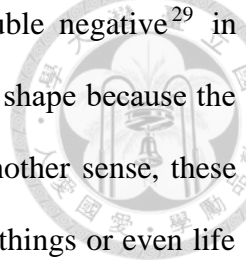
To sum up, there are three fundamental principles in Lovecraft's philosophy. First, concerning the scenes of man, they must be described in a realistic style. This kind of

²⁷ Joshi, S. T. "Time, Space, and Natural Law: Science and Pseudo-Science in Lovecraft." *Lovecraft Annual*, no. 4, 2010, pp. 171-201.

²⁸ Joshi, S. T., Sharrett, Christopher. "Lovecraft Today: An Interview with Joshi." *Cinéaste*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2015. In one of the interviews, Joshi somehow revealed the nature of Lovecraft's writing.

The logo of National Taiwan University (NTU) is located in the upper right quadrant of the page. It is a circular emblem with a central design featuring a book and a lamp, surrounded by the university's name in Chinese and English.

description represents the finiteness of human understanding of the world. The seemingly omniscient perception of the environment will meet its flaw when the characters encounter the unknowable being from the Outside, in other words, things concerning extraterrestrial beings. They can only be described in tattered language or even cannot be accessed by any means. Second, there are different sets of reality in Lovecraft's writing—human-centered reality and reality in things. The anthropocentric reality deals with the human sensual construction of the phenomenal world. It is completely anthropocentric and limited to man's viewpoint. Contra the human-centered world, things from the Outside demonstrate enigmatic features that violate the natural law on earth. These monstrous encounters with the unnamable objects challenge the faculty of reason in the characters' minds. Even though they can describe those unknown objects in a seemingly realistic way, for example, the description of the gigantic fossil in *At the Mountains of Madness*, they are meaningless narratives because they simply catch the vague adumbrations of the unknown. The reality of those strange things remains a mystery. Third, nonhuman entities are viewed as equal actors to mankind from Lovecraft's perspective. The things from the Outside reveal a different set of existence that man cannot decipher. This kind of life form is not limited to physical creatures. The sensual perception such as color can be a kind of life form in Lovecraft's universe. Furthermore, these unknown creatures show that humanity is not omnipotent and omniscient as we have imagined. In Lovecraft's philosophy, the world is a plenum. Even sensual perception can be a kind of life form that affects other entities. The aesthetic framework in Lovecraft's philosophy demonstrates the diversification of different entities, including the nonhuman objects, and the interplay between them. In

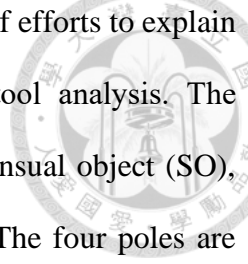


one sense, things from the Outside can be described by the double negative²⁹ in Lovecraft's stories. But they can only vaguely portray the physical shape because the reality of the object itself cannot be accessed by any means. In another sense, these strange objects do not remain static. They will gradually penetrate things or even life around them. There are two levels of cosmic horror in Lovecraft's writing. One refers to the way of describing the horror of those strange objects through the aesthetics of language, such as the double negative or the oxymoron. The other one points to the inaccessible horror from the ontological weirdness that Lovecraft's monsters revealed.³⁰ The boundary between two levels of the world, one the human world and the other that of the unknown that belongs to the monsters, is blurred in Lovecraft's stories. This is an irreversible change regardless of the subject's or the monster's will. When the characters encounter things from the Outside, the transformation occurs both in the characters and in the weird things. Above all, things beyond human understanding reveal another set of "natural laws." However, their operating system can only be accessed partially by mankind, which is the only measure to overcome the fundamental deficiency in humanity. Therefore, Lovecraft chose to employ the realistic but oxymoron style to describe things concerning the Outside.

Lovecraft's philosophy inspires several contemporary significant horror fiction writers, but his mode of the aesthetic framework is slightly valued. Yet, a contemporary school of literary critics resumes Lovecraft's argument concerning aesthetics. Object-oriented ontology (OOO) is a school of literary critics that values the interplay between/within objects. The autonomy of objects is the basic recognition for OOO

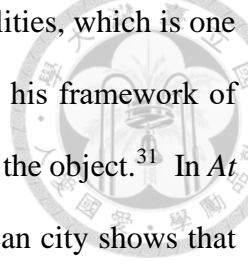
²⁹ The double negative refers to the strategy of literary writing. In "The Call of Cthulhu," the narrator's words that he "shall not be unfaithful to the spirit of the thing" serves as a good example to illustrate the strategy of the double negative in Lovecraft's stories.

³⁰ The weirdness from the ontological level does not entail a sense of ontological horror which tends to refer to the anthropocentric definition of horror. The ontological weirdness in Lovecraft's writing points to the weirdness within Lovecraftian things, which is grotesque and out of human logic.



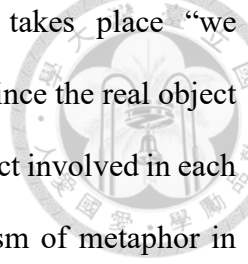
scholars. As a leading figure in OOO, Graham Harman makes lots of efforts to explain the fourfold structure within objects, referring to Heidegger's tool analysis. The fundamental quadruple structure within each entity refers to the sensual object (SO), sensual qualities (SQ), real object (RO), and real qualities (RQ). The four poles are polarized into two realms—the sensual realm and the real realm. Take an apple as an example. The sensual object of an apple refers to the image of an apple captured in human consciousness. The sensual qualities of an apple point to the sensual perception of it such as the redness of an apple, the sweetness of an apple, etc. Regardless of man's will, the real object of an apple involves what defines an apple as an apple. The essential features such as the chemical compositions of an apple belong to the real qualities of an apple, which will not vary with human consciousness. The four extremes generate the causal effect between everything. One of Harman's significant arguments is the fundamental fracture between the sensual realm and the real realm. Due to this intrinsic gulf, Harman devoted lots of effort to solve the problem concerning the interplay between the four poles. Furthermore, there is an absolute gap between each entity in Harman's philosophy. In other words, nothing can touch another entity "directly" in his framework. Therefore, the four tensions between the four extremes give an account of how the four poles interact within/between different entities.

Harman's philosophy values one simple rule: that is the withdrawn real object cannot be accessed by any means. Due to this principle, all contacts in Harman's framework are asymmetrical. In other words, contact between two independent entities is not commutative but partial. "There is always just one real object involved in any interaction" (*QO* 75) because the withdrawn object cannot touch another real object either. For Harman, the tensions between objects and their qualities reveal the dynamics of the object itself. Through fission and fusion, the object itself will experience a series of internal changes. However, both SQ and RQ are not connected to either SO or RO.



Harman values the possible mobility between the object and its qualities, which is one of the reasons that Harman believes Lovecraft's writing illustrated his framework of the object. The sum total of the qualities is not equal to the reality of the object.³¹ In *At the Mountains of Madness* the description of the Antarctic Cyclopean city shows that the object "is something over and above the total abundance of features" (WR 165). The city unfolds "a total effect not reducible to a sum total of architectural sub-unit" (WR 166). The city expresses something more than the sum total of its parts, which is different from Aristotle's theory, which highlights the consistency between the sum total of its sensual qualities and its ideal form. In Lovecraft's story, the description of the Cthulhu idol explores the same issue. "I shall not be unfaithful to the spirit of the thing...but it was the general outline of the whole which made it most shockingly frightful" (WR qtd. 57). The ambiguous reference to the Cthulhu idol reveals that the reality of the idol is not equal to the literal description. The reality of the idol cannot be mentioned completely. The "spirit of the thing" points to the real object while "the general outline of the whole" points to the real qualities. Since the real objects are always absent from the sensual realm where the sensual qualities exist, the withdrawn real objects can only allude to the accessible sensual qualities. It is clear that the double negative reveals not only the unnamable nature of those strange objects but also the literary aesthetics in Lovecraft's writing. For Harman, the only real object involved in this process is the perceiving human subject who replaced the missing real object of the Cthulhu idol and then embraced its sensual qualities. Therefore, the process of metaphor is a process of replacement to put us, the perceiving human subject, into this core of orbit. According to Harman's presupposition, the forever withdrawn object can only be accessed metaphorically. In *Object-Oriented Ontology*, he explains the process of how

³¹ More details of the applications of Harman's theory to Lovecraft's stories will be discussed in the following two chapters.



metaphor takes place. Harman suggests that when metaphor takes place “we ourselves ... are the real objects at stake in aesthetics” (OOO 85). Since the real object cannot contact another real object directly, there is only one real object involved in each causal relationship. The example of acting illustrates the mechanism of metaphor in Harman’s framework.³² In Harman’s theory, there is a difference between imitation and being brought into character. Imitation simply catches the images or features of the object that it tries to imitate. While, being brought into character is to replace the real object with another real object, which is the underlying structure of metaphor that Harman argued. For example, if I were to act a dog, it is not simply putting on the costume of a dog that makes me a dog. I need to figure out the pattern of how a dog behaves and immerse myself in the character of a dog. The process of metaphor gives rise to the fracture of the four poles of the dog (see fig. 1).³³ That is, in the process of immersing myself as a dog, the original SO of the dog is missing. Now it is the SQ of the “I” who is acting the dog in order to replace the SQ of the dog. People simply see the SO of the “I” who is acting a dog since the RO of the dog is always withdrawn from the scene. At the same time, the RO of the “I” will replace the original RO of the dog because the SQ of a dog needs a real object to support these qualities. Thus, it is “I myself, a real experiencer of the metaphor” (OOO 84) who come to this position to uphold the sensual qualities of a dog because I am the one who is acting the dog (see fig. 2).³⁴ According to this example, it is clear that Harman emphasizes the structure of the composition of each object. By means of metaphor, objects can indirectly communicate with each other.

³² The example of acting comes from my adviser, Prof. Yung Chao, Liao.

³³ The figure of the four poles of the dog is adapted from Harman’s illustration in *Object-Oriented Ontology* on page 80.

³⁴ The figure of metaphor is adapted from Harman’s illustration in *Object-Oriented Ontology* on page 84.

Figure 1. The original four poles of the dog

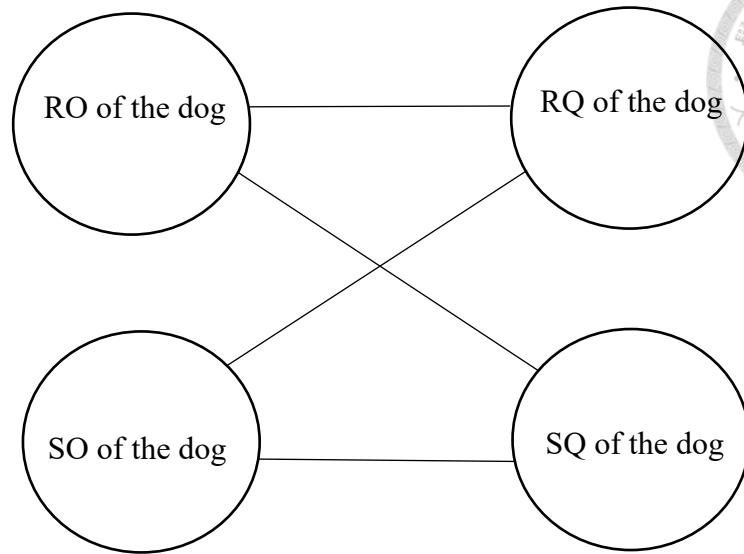
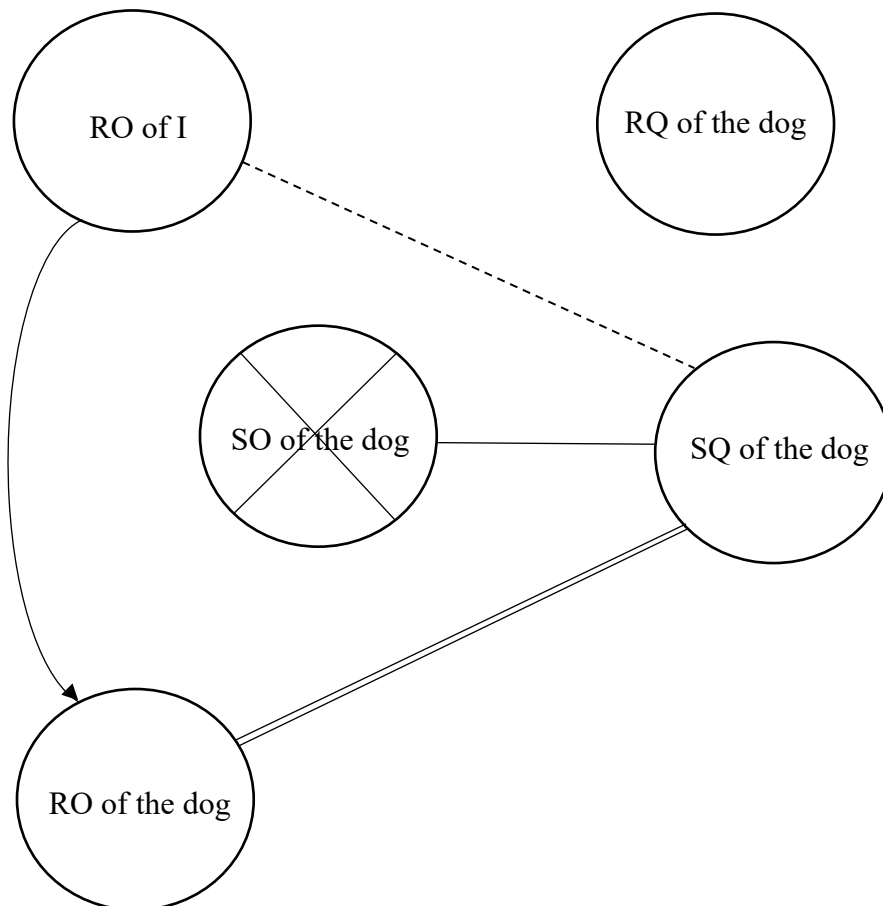
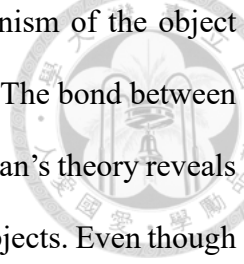


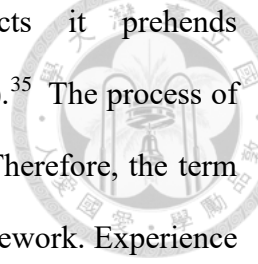
Figure 2. Metaphor





Like a cluster of gears, Harman's object expresses the mechanism of the object itself. An object need not inevitably link to some essential qualities. The bond between the object and its qualities is flexible. However, in my opinion, Harman's theory reveals a serious problem: that is the fundamental fracture within/between objects. Even though Harman makes lots of efforts to explain the interplay between the four poles within objects, he leaves the question of whether the real realm has dynamics. Even if he does not negate the noumena like Kant, the real realm in his framework is tattered and without interaction. At the ontological level, the intrinsic fracture blocks the possibility for the real object and the real qualities to have any direct contact. As a result, Harman values Lovecraft's way of describing those mysterious things from space. He suggests Lovecraft's writing style traverses the limitations that come from the forever withdrawn objects. Through metaphor and oxymoron Lovecraft gets to indirectly reveal the reality of those strange things.

Nevertheless, Harman's emphasis on the dynamics of the object itself inspires several philosophers to dive into the issue of the aesthetics of objects. Among the scholars, Steven Shaviro's theory reveals a slightly different viewpoint concerning the issue of aesthetics within objects. Contra Harman's favor of Heidegger's tool analysis, Shaviro tends to favor Alfred North Whitehead's philosophy. In *Process and Reality*, Whitehead investigates the issue of the Cartesian subject. Descartes's subject concerns the question of the subject's mind, which deals with the problem of representation. However, Whitehead repudiates the concept that the ontology of things simply concerns the dynamics of the objects in the sensual realm as Descartes argued. In his philosophy, causality is an "experience that pulls the actual entities that constitute its immediate past, its actual world, into the unity (of "experience") that it is" (Janusz and Sherburne 6). In "James and Whitehead: Assemblage and Systematization of a Deep Empiricist Mosaic Philosophy" Paul Stenner discusses Whitehead's philosophy. He suggests that

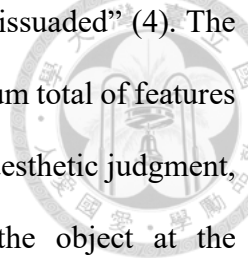


“the experiencing subject does not pre-exist the objects it prehends (superjects/expressions), but creates itself through feeling them” (6).³⁵ The process of becoming requires the experiencing subject to feel other entities. Therefore, the term “experience” and “feeling” are interchangeable in Whitehead’s framework. Experience in Whitehead’s theory does not refer to the experience of a specific person but points to an ability that can take account of the environment, which is also interchangeable with the term “feeling” in Whitehead’s philosophy. Based on his example of amoeba, even in a primitive mode of life, “there is some primitive mode of taking account of the environment, some basic way of ‘feeling,’ or being in relation with, other actual entities” (Janusz and Sherburne 6). That is to say, a non-human entity is also capable of *feeling* another entity in Whitehead’s perspective. Furthermore, this argument leads to another significant term in Whitehead’s philosophy—prehension. It refers “to the primitive, unconscious, primordial, attenuated way that, way down at the bottom of the scale of organic and then inorganic being, one actual occasion takes account of another” (Janusz and Sherburne 6). In other words, prehension is the precondition of becoming within an actual entity. At the primordial level, objects perceive each other, which is a continuous procedure that influences the object itself. The constant changing process within an actual entity is the main subject of Whitehead’s theory.

Inspired by Whitehead’s philosophy, Shaviro delves into the topic of aesthetics. In *Without Criteria: Kant, Whitehead, Deleuze, and Aesthetics*, Shaviro argues that “a judgment of beauty is affective, rather than cognitive” (4).³⁶ That is, beauty is not a property of a certain object but an ability to take account of the environment. In Shaviro’s definition, aesthetic judgment does not lead to mutual understanding; rather,

³⁵ Stenner, Paul. “James and Whitehead: Assemblage and Systematization of a Deep Empiricist Mosaic Philosophy.” *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy*, 2011.

³⁶ This book will be cited as *WC*.



the subject is “being lured, allured, seduced, repulsed, incited, or dissuaded” (4). The subject is moved by the object which has something more than the sum total of features of the object. Contra Kant’s emphasis on the four preconditions of aesthetic judgment, Shaviro’s speculative aesthetics investigates the dynamics of the object at the ontological level. “Aesthetic experience is a kind of *communication without communion* and *without consensus*” (6). It is a continuous process deep down to the ontological level but does not end up with a symmetric exchange. Moreover, it has to be clarified that Shaviro follows Whitehead’s definition of the term “experience”—an ability to affect or to be affected by another entity. Based on these presumptions, Shaviro proposes that Whitehead’s philosophy aims to overcome “the bifurcation of nature”³⁷ and develops a framework of equal ontological status for everything. From the perspective of OOO, Shaviro tries to “develop a Whitehead-inspired critique of Harman and OOO” (*UT 27*). He establishes a framework of “speculative aesthetics,” which emphasizes the exchange at the ontological level. Shaviro defines prehension as “any process ... in which an entity grasps, registers the presence of, responds to, or is affected by another entity” (*UT 29*) which is a constant process within each entity. His speculative aesthetics follows one fundamental principle: that is, the dynamics of aesthetics at the ontological level does not focus on whether the object can be fully accessed. Instead, it emphasizes the fact that at the ontological level two entities can make contact. In opposition to Harman’s insistence on the forever withdrawn object, Shaviro pays attention to the primordial ability to take account of the environment at the ontological level. Both Shaviro and Harman try to establish a classless ontological status for everything, but they emphasize different aspects. The former values the flow

³⁷ Whitehead, Alfred North. *The Concept of Nature*. The Project Gutenberg Ebooks, 2006. This concept was first proposed by North Whitehead whose idea aimed to eliminate the dichotomy division between the two sets of reality, one of phenomenology and another of the scientific-oriented reality.

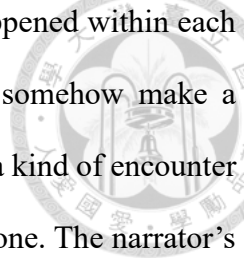
of change in objects; the latter insists that all entities will withdraw into the same inaccessible realm. Obviously, Shaviro favors Whitehead's argument. However, he does not completely negate Harman's framework but proposes a slight revision to Harman's presuppositions.

In short, Shaviro's speculative aesthetics can be summarized as follows: object will be changed but remain unchanged at the same time. "All entities, of all sizes and scales, have the same degree of reality" (UT 29). He rejects the hierarchy of objects like Harman does, but he pays more attention to the interaction between objects. In *Connection, or What It Means to Live in the Network Society*, Shaviro inspects the issue of connection from several domains and several writers' theories. He reaches the conclusion that connection is inevitable for every entity. That is to say, we cannot avoid interaction with other entities. This condition makes the issue of experience or encounters a significant matter to be discussed. Following this presupposition, Shaviro deals with the issue of encounters in-depth. Experience is a significant issue in both Whitehead and Shaviro's philosophy:

One sense that we are not alone in the world, that things *matter* to us and to one another, that life is full of encounters and adventures. There is a deep sense in which I remained the same person, no matter what happened to me. But there is an equally deep sense in which I am changed irrevocably by my experience... (UT 32).

Every encounter in Shaviro's framework will bring about a series of internal changes in the entity. Objects "perpetually perish."³⁸ Harman's objects cannot be fully prehended because they will withdraw. Whereas Shaviro's objects cannot be absolutely understood either since objects in the next second cease to be the same one. He

³⁸ Whitehead, Alfred North. *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*. The free Press, 1978. This concept was first proposed by Whitehead in this publication. This book will be cited as *PR* in this research.



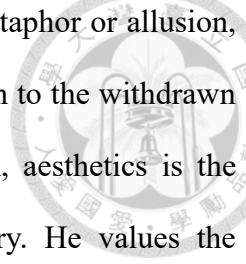
interprets “perpetually perish” as a constant internal change that happened within each entity. In other words, every encounter with another entity will somehow make a difference to the object. Even if the object stays static, time itself is a kind of encounter that will differentiate the object in the next second from the former one. The narrator’s travel to the Innsmouth in *The Shadow over Innsmouth* provides an example to illustrate Shaviro’s framework of objects. The anonymous narrator’s travel to the Innsmouth made him realize the obscure secret of his lineage. At the point he witnesses the “exotic” tiara in the museum, he undergoes an irreversible change within himself. After the short visit to the Innsmouth, the narrator gradually transforms into the form that he feared, the shape of the deep ones.³⁹ This example reveals that the narrator remains the same person after his travel to the Innsmouth but there is something different within himself. And this kind of change is irrevocable. The interesting point is that in addition to the irreversible change within the subject, this transformation is regardless of human will. This fact reflects another significant argument in Shaviro’s framework: “aesthetic judgments are indeed ‘blind’ because they are made without understanding and even without knowledge” (*UT* 156). For both Shaviro and Harman, all sorts of experiences must be aesthetic because men cannot reach the withdrawn real realm. But it does not bother for experience to occur from Shaviro’s perspective. “Perception, feeling, and aesthetics are universal structures, not specifically human ones” (*UT* 61). At the ontological level, causal efficacy, inferred from Whitehead’s term, already happened between two entities. The subject deals with the problem of sensual objects which can never be fully accessed in the phenomenal realm. But in the real realm, experience already happened before the subject recognizes the fact. “In the realm of causal efficacy, we have rather to do with a sort of total contact, a promiscuous interchange among

³⁹ This is a fictional alien species in Lovecraft’s stories. They inhabit the deep ocean nearby Innsmouth, also a fictional town in Massachusetts.

objects” (UT 56). In Shaviro’s framework, causalities happen at the ontological level before it is perceived. In *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, even though the narrator does not go on an expedition for his lineage, the transformation still will happen.

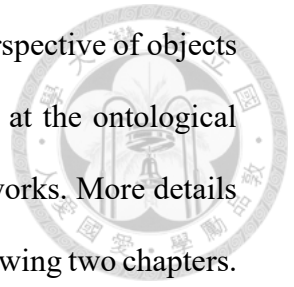
Speculative aesthetics is a theory that is waiting to be accomplished. Shaviro has clarified several points that this theory emphasized. First, objects will withdraw since they will perpetually perish not because they will withdraw into the same inaccessible realm that Harman has argued. Second, “entities interact by ‘feeling’ one another, even in the absence of knowledge and manipulability” (UT 55). Shaviro’s preference for Whitehead’s philosophy shows that every encounter in his perspective is aesthetic. The action of feeling in Shaviro’s philosophy refers to the interaction between two entities, which is not exclusively human-oriented. This concept does not contradict the concept of withdrawn objects because it is the perpetually perishing object that cannot be accessed. It does not bother for experience to take place. In one sense, the experience itself cannot be fully deciphered by another entity either. Shaviro’s example of toothache serves as the best example. When someone gets a toothache, another person definitely knows what he meant by toothache; but this person cannot absolutely feel the pain like him. This example reveals that experience itself does not request full understanding. Even if it cannot be described or fully copied by another entity, it still takes place. Therefore, in Shaviro’s speculative aesthetics, he encourages to analyze the causal relationship between objects from a speculative attitude, because he believes that aesthetics is the way for mankind to act and relate to other entities, and it would be a better perspective to probe the issue of encounters.

To sum up, the recent development of object-oriented ontology provides an angle that differed from the anthropocentric viewpoint in discussing the issue of ontology and the causal relationship of objects. Interestingly, the OOO philosophers all view aesthetics as an important means to deal with the problem. Harman’s philosophy



emphasizes the quadruple structure within each entity. Through metaphor or allusion, aesthetics serves as a rescue to solve the obstacles of the connection to the withdrawn real object in an indirect way in his framework. Contra Harman, aesthetics is the ontological condition for causality to happen in Shaviro's theory. He values the interplay between different entities and the constant internal change in each object. Interactions do not require full understanding. At the ontological level, causality, which is a term interchangeable with experience in Shaviro's framework, already takes place. Aesthetics serves as a significant means for mankind to relocate our viewpoint, which will be speculative and completely object-oriented. There are several similarities in both Shaviro's and Lovecraft's philosophies. First, a speculative attitude toward everything is the presupposition. Objects are constantly changing, which makes them impossible to be entirely understood just as things concerning the Outside in Lovecraft's stories are beyond human knowledge and will gradually penetrate other entities. The color that comes with the meteorite, the giant fossil, the fearful deep ones, etc. things from Outside undergo a series of changes within themselves but follow a pattern that is beyond human knowledge. The uncertain condition of things is a significant feature in Lovecraft's stories. Second, mankind ceases to be the criterion of everything. Both Shaviro and Lovecraft place non-human entities on equal ontological status with humans. Various kinds of life forms in Lovecraft's stories demonstrate the finiteness of human knowledge and diverse modes of interaction between different entities such as the color that will gradually intrude the things it contacted, and the genes that will transform people into another kind of life form. Shaviro's theory can be illustrated through the examples in Lovecraft's writing. Moreover, Lovecraft's creations of those extraterrestrial beings provide good examples of what it means to view things speculatively. Through Shaviro's speculative aesthetics, I try to construct an aesthetic framework from the perspective of objects by analyzing the ontology of those

extraterrestrial beings and the interplay between entities from the perspective of objects in Lovecraft's story. The weird causality between different entities at the ontological level will be illustrated by analyzing several scenes in Lovecraft's works. More details and examples mentioned above will be discussed in detail in the following two chapters.



Chapter Two

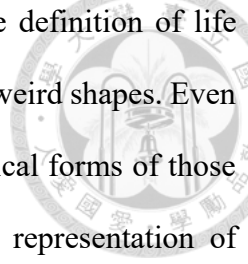
The Weird Aesthetic Ontology of the Lovecraftian Things



In the introductory chapter of *The Complete Fiction of H. P. Lovecraft*,⁴⁰ Eric Carl Link argues that Lovecraft’s insistence on the existence of supernatural horror reminds the reader that “our knowledge of the world in which we live is incomplete” (xiii). According to his life experience and writing style, Lovecraft tries to reveal that “the world that surrounds us may not be the full portion of the real” (xv). Those extraterrestrial beings and strange objects that come with them show the fact that “the true nature of cosmos is both infinite and monstrously different” (xv) from mankind’s original understanding of the world. Among his works, the Lovecraftian objects unfold a set of weird ontology that challenges our definition of objects and natural laws. Objects in Lovecraft’s writing show a different form of existence. He emphasizes that objects concerned with extraterrestrial civilization reject human understanding. In this chapter, I will focus on the issue of the form, features, and the weird presence of these Lovecraftian things to analyze these mysterious objects in Lovecraft’s writing. Most important of all, Shaviro’s speculative aesthetics will serve as a significant viewpoint to interpret the nameless strange objects. Shaviro’s speculative aesthetics aims to break the limit of the Kantian philosophy of finitude. He affirms that it is because human is not the core of everything, human knowledge is limited and incomplete. Therefore, philosophy functions to “speculate about all things it cannot access directly” (*UT* 136). His framework will help to illustrate the weird ontology of those Lovecraftian objects.

In Lovecraft’s philosophy, cosmic horror comes from the irresistible fear of the monstrous things that come from space. Their existence, features, and interaction with

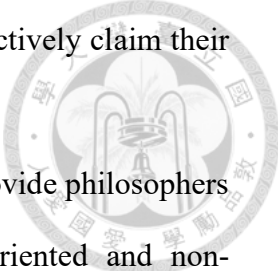
⁴⁰ Lovecraft, H. P. *The Complete Fiction of H. P. Lovecraft*. Chartwell Books, 2016. This book will be quoted as *CFL* in the rest of this research.



other entities overthrow human's understanding of objects and the definition of life forms. The most conspicuous feature of Lovecraftian things is their weird shapes. Even though Lovecraft devotes lots of paragraphs to describing the physical forms of those extraterrestrial objects, the objects themselves simply reject any representation of human language. Since the Lovecraftian objects follow another set of natural laws that are beyond human recognition, people can only portray the sensual features we assume that we have perceived. Second, Lovecraftian things reveal the paradoxical compositions of features on a single object. That is to say, they do not obey the same set of regular principles as mankind does. Lovecraft does not portray those mysterious objects by using "either ... or" structure but makes one single entity cover several paradoxical features such as the tough but flexible torso of the Old Ones. Third, all Lovecraftian things positively proclaim their existence. As long as people get aware of its abnormality, people will undergo a series of irreversible ontological changes. Sometimes, the change occurred before human recognition. In other words, regardless of human consciousness, Lovecraftian things exist and make contact with other entities. It has to be clarified that I prefer to term all kinds of weird things in the stories to be "Lovecraftian things," including creatures like Cthulhu and the Deep Ones. In my opinion, Lovecraftian things refer to a form of existence that is different from the philosophical structure that human has constructed. The source of cosmic horror or the existence of life form does not have to be physical objects. The queer⁴¹ life forms such as the Old Ones and Cthulhu can be a kind of Lovecraftian things that arouse a sense of cosmic horror. Therefore, Harman describes the fictional town Arkham, Massachusetts to be "*a public museum exhibit in Arkham devoted to the object*" (*WR*

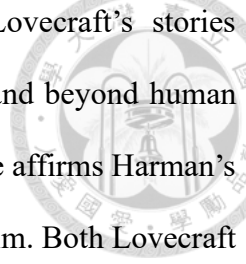
⁴¹ The word "queer" does not point to the queer theory that concerns gender study. In this thesis, queer refers to the state that is abnormal or the strange feeling in the character's mind. For example, in *The Colour out of Space*, Lovecraft describes the thing that comes with the meteor as the "queer" color. In Lovecraft's writing, the word "queer" does not have to be related to sexuality. Queer is an expression of the character's uncertainty about the shapes or features of those extraterrestrial beings.

36). Lovecraft shapes a world where things beyond understanding actively claim their existence.

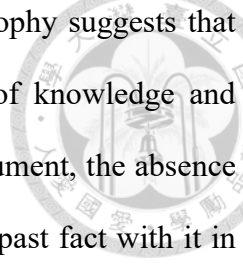


Lovecraft's works not only inspire horror fiction writers but provide philosophers with another angle to probe into the world, which is object-oriented and non-anthropocentric. Heidegger's well-known tool analysis draws people's attention back to the existence of objects. Since then, technology ceases to be simply a kind of tool that is ready to be used. The autonomy of objects becomes an important issue in modern society. Among the object-oriented scholars, Steven Shaviro's speculative aesthetics explores the ontological force that leads to the causal relationship between different entities. According to Shaviro's argument, causation between entities refers to "an object's *being affected* by another" (UT 137). Knowledge of the object is not the precondition that leads to the causal relationship. That is, contra Harman's focus on the quadruple structure of each object, Shaviro emphasizes the dynamics between two entities. He affirms Harman's argument that "finitude, therefore, means not only that there are limits to our knowledge of the moon but also—and much more importantly—that there limits to our independence from the moon" (UT 137). For Shaviro, it is impossible to fully understand another entity because objects are constantly changing in themselves. He designates the "vicarious causation" in Harman's framework as "contact at a distance" and "think of it as a sort of sensibility, or sensitivity, without knowledge and without intentionality" (UT 147). It takes place "in a mode that is not accessible to cognition or to knowledge" (UT 148). Thus, in Shaviro's speculative aesthetics, contact between objects is all aesthetic and beyond human knowledge which occurs at the ontological level. Regardless of human consciousness, causality simply takes place without reason.

There are several similarities between Lovecraft's Cthulhuesque worldview and Shaviro's speculative aesthetics. Both Lovecraft and Shaviro refuse to view mankind



as the center of the universe. The extraterrestrial beings in Lovecraft's stories demonstrate the diversity of life forms which is absolutely weird and beyond human understanding. Shaviro also values the uncertainty of each entity. He affirms Harman's argument that objects will forever withdraw into an inaccessible realm. Both Lovecraft and Shaviro assert that knowledge of an object is not the precondition of causality. Moreover, Shaviro proposes that "aesthetic contact with another object always occurs over an unbridgeable distance" (*UT* 145), which he terms "aesthetic causality." He emphasizes the fact that causality happens without any presupposition. In Shaviro's philosophy, aesthetic causality refers to the principle of all kinds of contact. The dynamics of speculative aesthetics reveals that "aesthetic contact happens in the first instance outside knowledge, on a level beneath the threshold of conscious perception or beyond its capacities to recognize or relate" (*UT* 149). Aesthetics is the force that gives rise to causality regardless of perception and human knowledge. Second, Lovecraft and Shaviro view aesthetics as a significant element to establish their viewpoint. Through different literary techniques, Lovecraft tries to construct the atmosphere of cosmic horror which he believes to be the most important element of a horror tale. The extraterrestrial being is out of logic. People can only refer to their aesthetic perception of these queer encounters with Lovecraftian things. As for Shaviro's speculative aesthetics, aesthetics is taken as an underlying structure of all kinds of interaction. "Aesthetics is the key to causality" (*UT* 138). It is the precondition of causality in his philosophy. Last, the constantly changing state within each object is the fundamental principle in their frameworks. Objects can neither be fully accessed by any means nor remain changeless. In Lovecraft's writing, even if things concerning extraterrestrial civilizations follow another set of natural laws, they will be adapted to the environment. In several stories, it is obvious that extraterrestrial beings are gradually changing themselves. Contra Harman's framework, Shaviro prefers Whitehead's

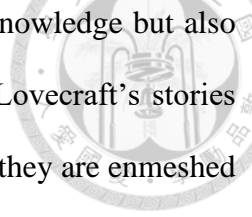


framework of aesthetics. Shaviro believes that Whitehead's philosophy suggests that "entities interact by 'feeling' one another, even in the absence of knowledge and manipulability" (*UT* 55). The point here is that in Whitehead's argument, the absence of knowledge of an object is because "the present fact has not the past fact with it in any full immediacy" (*PR* 340). Objects will perpetually perish. Therefore, it is impossible to fully understand an entity. Following Whitehead's concept, Shaviro also values the constantly changing state of an object. The continual change within the object is a universal principle that is applicable to both animate and inanimate entities. In his philosophy, this is a fundamental force that exists at the ontological level, which is also ongoing and democratic. The similarities mentioned above can be illustrated by analyzing three significant issues in Lovecraft's writing, that is, the form of the object, the features of those Lovecraftian things, and the presence of those weird objects.

To begin with, many scholars deal with the issue of form in Lovecraft's stories. Things in Lovecraft's writing do not appear to be the normal objects as readers have imagined. The shapes of Lovecraftian things must be grotesque and out of logic. He prefers to portray those extraterrestrial beings as "blasphemous-looking" (*CFL* 647), "diminutive figure" (*CFL* 388), "Innsmouth look" (*CFL* 880), etc. Generally, science fails to decipher these strange objects. Vivian Ralickas mentions that:

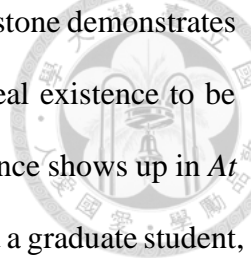
The inability of Lovecraft's protagonists to perceive phenomena with the kind of objective distance demanded by the aesthetic gaze originates in their enmeshment in "cosmic horror," a devastating experience which rouses a fear far exceeding that of merely dying. In death, our finite, individual being ceases to be, yet we can find comfort in our awareness that our cultural heritage value and that the community we leave behind will survive us. Lovecraft's characters cannot find solace in these thoughts, since the horror they face is an index of the meaninglessness of the human condition. (297-8)⁴²

⁴² Ralickas, Vivian. "Art, Cosmic Horror, and the Fetishizing Gaze in the Fictions of H. P. Lovecraft." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2009, pp. 297-316.



The failure of science not only indicates the finiteness of human knowledge but also implies a devastating experience of cosmic horror. Characters in Lovecraft's stories cannot escape from the grotesque supernatural experiences because they are enmeshed in the looming horror of those extraterrestrial existences. The negation of general laws is a common element in Lovecraft's writing, which is also an expression of his philosophy—non-anthropocentric. Object-oriented philosophers like Harman view Lovecraft's works as the best example to illustrate his framework. In *Weird Realism*, Harman mentions that there are two extremes of Lovecraft's literary style: "the 'vertical' gap between unknowable objects and their tangible qualities, and the 'horizontal' or 'cubist' gap between an inaccessible object and its gratuitous amassing of numerous palpable surfaces" (WR 31). In other words, the vertical gap points to "some underlying reality and the incapacity of language to express it adequately" (WR 89). He argues the different ways of distortion of the flowers in *The Colour out of Space* is the best example of the Lovecraftian vertical gap. As for the horizontal rift, Harman suggests that the narrator's encounter with the bus driver in *The Shadow over Innsmouth* reflects the classic Lovecraftian cubist rift. The narrator's description of the problematic features of the driver's appearance reveals that the sensual object and its sensual qualities are "pile[d] up in disturbing profusion" (WR 34). Harman analyzes Lovecraft's writing style and argues that literary description is a way to indirectly access the reality of the withdrawn real object. On the contrary, Shaviro focuses on the dynamics at the ontological level. In addition to the knowledge of the object, the fact that causality occurred is the emphasis in Shaviro's philosophy.

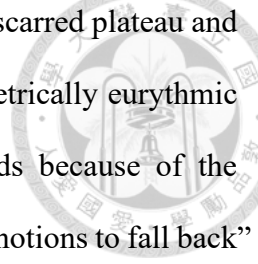
In *The Colour out of Space*, the meteorite that fell into Gardner's land gives rise to the downfall of the Gardners. Scientists from the Miskatonic university are puzzled by the weird phenomena of the specimen of the meteorite. The physical condition of



the meteor violates the natural laws on earth. It seems that this queer stone demonstrates the features that challenge our common sense. But this rock is a real existence to be reckoned with. The eeriest description concerning the failure of science shows up in *At the Mountains of Madness*. The narrator, Professor William Dyer and a graduate student, Danforth, fly over the dark high mountains where they discovered an ancient alien civilization that has never been known to mankind. The cyclopean city is described as the construction of “preternatural massiveness, and utterly alien exoticism” (*MM* 61). The geometry of the city all goes wrong. Harman suggests that Lovecraft’s description of the Cyclopean city, especially for the details of the non-Euclidean architecture, illustrates the horizontal gap in his writing. On the wall, the narrator discovers pictures that portrayed the appearance of the city. Professor Dyer states that:

Even the pictures illustrate only one or two phases of its endless variety, preternatural massiveness, and utterly alien exoticism. There were geometrical forms for which an Euclid would scarcely find a name. (*MM* 61)

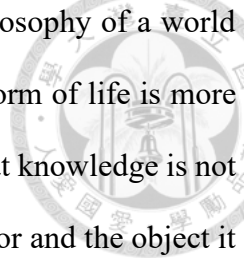
There is truly an ancient Cyclopean city standing in front of the characters. They can describe the sensual features of those weird buildings. But “the scene of the whole city expresses “something over and above the total abundance of features” (*WR* 165). The sensual Cyclopean city and its palpable features form a sense of weirdness that is beyond human knowledge. The Antarctic Cyclopean city unfolds a weird ontology that somehow creates a Kantian dynamical sublime in the narrator’s mind. It has to be clarified that in Lovecraft’s writing, the last cosmic horror that the characters witness defeats their faculty of reason. After that, the characters are out of their mind. Before the monstrous encounter with the last cosmic horror, the characters are capable of expressing their feelings in human language. That is to say, they are still following logical thinking and not yet going across the threshold of reason. In *At the Mountains*



of *Madness*, the protagonists are shocked by the “limitless, tempest-scarred plateau and grasped the almost endless labyrinth of colossal, regular, and geometrically eurythmic stone of masses” (MM 53). Even though they are lost for words because of the monstrous sight of the Cyclopean city, they still have some “normal notions to fall back” (MM 53) at this moment. Moreover, the protagonist describes the appearance of the buildings in detail. He even keeps several illustrations and pictures of this Antarctic Cyclopean city. But “the words reaching the reader can never even suggest the awfulness of the sight itself” (MM 120). The concrete ariel photographs and the records of the expedition cannot convey the shocking effect created by witnessing the city itself. The failure of science not only expresses the finiteness of the human mind but reveals the fact that there are different sets of natural laws in the universe. In other words, the form of existence is far more diverse than humans have presupposed.

The weird color in *The Colour out of Space* serves as the best example to demonstrate the diverse forms of existence in Lovecraft’s writing. The unexpected visitor that comes with the meteor is a color that has never been discovered. It must be “a piece of the great outside” (CFL 642) that people who witnessed this strange spectrum describe as “a queer way impossible to describe” (CFL 644). Some witnesses even doubt if it should be considered a “color.” Based on the plots, the readers are informed that this weird color is actually a kind of life form which is capable of making an impact on things it contacts. Unlike the Cthulhu sculpture, which is made of the image of Cthulhu,⁴³ the weird spectrum violates our fundamental definition of an object. Color should have been a product of human perception. Yet, in Lovecraft’s writing, a color could be a kind of life form that makes contact with and even endangers

⁴³ Cthulhu is one of the Great Old Ones, the mighty ancient species that dominated the earth long before the history of mankind, in Lovecraft’s fictional setting of the Cthulhu mythos. It is described as “a monster of anthropoid outline, but an octopus-like head” (CFL 389), which is greenish and releases an unbearable odor.



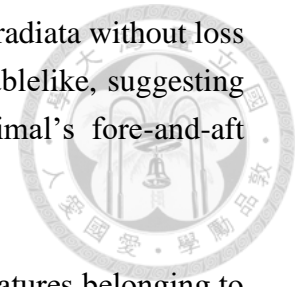
other entities. The weird spectrum directly unfolds Lovecraft's philosophy of a world where human knowledge is not the evaluation of everything. The form of life is more diversified than humans have suggested. In that case, it is clear that knowledge is not the necessary condition to arouse a causal relationship. Both the color and the object it contacts are short of information about each other. But causality simply takes place, which is the aesthetic causality that Shaviro has proposed. Aesthetic causality points to an operational system that is not completely closed and refers to the outside force and entities. He mentions that "my own actions or 'operations' *never* 'refer only to themselves'; they always relate directly to things and forces that are outside their power and beyond their reach" (*UT* 145). In other words, this is not merely an autopoietic system as Levi Bryant has defined, that is completely closed and never relates to the environment. For Shaviro, the aesthetic force is irreducible to itself but relates to the outside at the same time. Ontologically, this force can contact two entities but will not be assimilated by anyone.

Second, the paradoxical features that appear on each Lovecraftian object question the authenticity of human perceptions and our knowledge of the world. In Lovecraft's stories, it is common for the characters to encounter objects that performed features that should not have shown up on one single entity. Features that humans presupposed to be paradoxical are normal for extraterrestrial beings. In *At the Mountains of Madness*, the giant fossils⁴⁴ accidentally discovered by Professor Lake demonstrate two opposite features on one single entity. The torso of the giant fossil is "infinitely tough and leathery, but extremely flexible" (*CFL* 26). Scientists argue that they:

[c]annot yet assign positively to animal or vegetable kingdom, but odds now favor

⁴⁴ The giant fossils that Professor Lake discovered were somehow brought back to life and slaughtered the whole crew. Through Professor Dyer's exploration of the Cyclopean city, the giant fossils were identified to be the Old Ones, an extraterrestrial species that came to earth millions of years ago.

animal. Probably represents incredibly advanced evolution of radiata without loss of certain primitive features ... Symmetry is curiously vegetablelike, suggesting vegetable's essential up-and-down structure rather than animal's fore-and-aft structure. (*MM* 26)



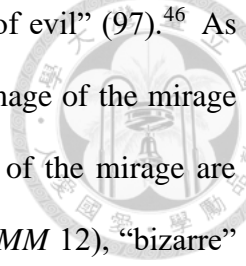
The torso of the Old Ones demonstrates a strange balance of the features belonging to the vegetable and the animal. Features that were originally considered paradoxical were placed harmoniously on the mysterious fossils. Obviously based on Lovecraft's vivid description of the Old Ones, he redefines the meaning of life form. Traditionally, scholars focus on interpreting Lovecraft's allegory of the Old Ones. The role of the Old Ones is compared to mankind. As the narrator said:

We understood the quality of cosmic fear to its uttermost depths. It was not fear of those missing others—for all too well did we suspect they would do no harm again. Poor devils! After all, they were not evil things of their kind. They were the men of another age and another order of being. (*MM* 115)

Professor Dyer ended up showing pity on the giant fossils that were accidentally awakened by Professor Lake's group from the aeon sleep. Because of the history carved on the mural, the narrator comes to realize that the downfall of the Old Ones will be the fate of men in the future. As McWilliam has argued that Lovecraft's cosmic horror "highlight[s] our ignorance, hubris, and frailty" (543).⁴⁵ The discovery of the Old Ones disclosed the gloomy fact that even a dominant species like them will lose its power.

In addition to the Old Ones, the scenes of the mirage also show significant features in Lovecraft's writing. The scenes of the mirage show up six times in different places during the expedition. According to Robert Waugh, the scenes of the mirage gradually

⁴⁵ McWilliam, David. "Beyond the Mountains of Madness: Lovecraftian Cosmic Horror and Posthuman Creationism in Ridley Scott's *Prometheus* (2012)." *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2015.



move “swiftly from the language of enchantment to the language of evil” (97).⁴⁶ As the characters get closer to “the forbidding peaks” (MM 49), the image of the mirage starts to arouse a sense of disturbance in their minds. The scenes of the mirage are described as “strikingly vivid” (MM 7), “fantastic and deceptive” (MM 12), “bizarre” (MM 36), “blasphemous” (MM 53), “monstrous and portentous” (MM 75), and “fantastic and demonic” (MM 126). The narrator’s interpretation of the images of the mirage gradually changed from simply a natural phenomenon to a symbol of evilness. Therefore, Waugh suggests that Lovecraft’s use of the mirage reflects that “we cannot distinguish between reality and the mirage” (97). When the characters are entangled with cosmic horror, the scene of the mirage ceases to be a natural scene but a representation of the looming force of alien beings. Scholars also pay attention to the existence of Shoggoth.⁴⁷ James Kneale suggests that “a highly realistic description is thrown into relief by the irruption of something impossible, and this tension is further heightened by the indeterminacy of Lovecraft’s descriptions” (111).⁴⁸ The vivid description of the architecture of the Cyclopean city and the formless protoplasm Shoggoth create a feeling of ambivalence and confrontation both for the characters and the readers.

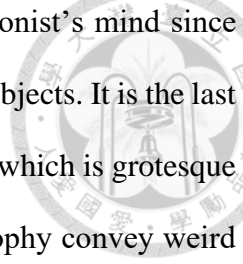
In Lovecraft’s works, it is common that “in the moment of the horror’s reveal, language and writing fail the narrator, and description becomes impossible” (Sperling 90).⁴⁹ The last cosmic horror that defeats the character’s faculty of reason is the fact of witnessing something beyond description. In *At the Mountains of Madness*, the discovery of the giant fossil, the cyclopean city where geometry all goes wrong, and

⁴⁶ Waugh, Robert. “Looming at the Mountains of Madness: Lovecraft’s mirages.” *New Critical Essays on H. P. Lovecraft*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp. 99-103.

⁴⁷ Shoggoth is a fictional creature in Lovecraft’s novella *At the Mountains of Madness*. It is created by the Old Ones. Shoggoth is capable of shifting its shapes and adapting to different environments.

⁴⁸ Kneale, James. “From Beyond: H. P. Lovecraft and the Place of Horror.” *Cultural Geographies*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2006, pp. 106-126.

⁴⁹ Sperling, Alison. “H. P. Lovecraft’s Weird Body.” *Lovecraft Annual*, No. 10, 2016, pp. 75-100.



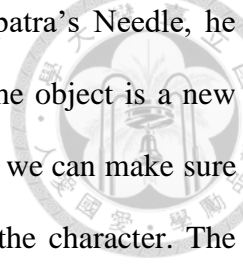
the shocking encounter of the Shoggoth do not conquer the protagonist's mind since they are still capable of describing the details of those Lovecraftian objects. It is the last cosmic horror Danforth witnessed that defeats his faculty of reason, which is grotesque and beyond description. Even though objects in Lovecraft's philosophy convey weird features that people cannot understand, some features are still perceptible. It is not exaggerated to say that Lovecraft demonstrates the framework of Shaviro's aesthetic contact in his description in *At the Mountains of Madness*. The Antarctic Cyclopean city reflects a different mode of thinking which cannot be understood by human logic. As a geologist, the protagonist is a well-trained scientist. The mysterious city which is never known to mankind is a discovery that cannot be clarified by common sense. However, the narrator still can analyze the Cyclopean city by his perception. The city is described as follows :

The general shape of these things tended to be conical, pyramidal, or terraced; though there were many perfect cylinders, perfect cubes, clusters of cubes, and other rectangular forms, and a peculiar sprinkling of angled edifices whose five-pointed ground plan roughly suggested modern fortification. (MM 55)

His dictions completely followed logical thinking when he portrays the city that is out of human understanding. The structure of the abandoned city reveals that the lost civilization of the Old Ones has its own logic. The geometry that is all wrong in the human eye actually works in the Cyclopean city. Even if science fails to decipher the logic of this alien city, people are still affected by the strange thing that appeared in front of them. The perception of the Cyclopean city is vivid and direct. The narrator does not give information on the history of this alien civilization, but it does not block his sensation to perceive the real city standing before his eyes. As I have mentioned above, knowledge is not the precondition of causality in Shaviro's framework. He pays more attention to the actual entity that exists in front of the observer. He values the real

object and the real force that makes contact with other entities, which is the fundamental principle of aesthetic contact. The narrator's detailed description of the unknown city proves that perception, both of mankind and nonhuman objects, is always at work. Knowledge definitely is not the precondition of the causal relationship between two entities.

In addition to the Cyclopean city, Professor Dyer focuses on interpreting the meaning of the mural that he discovered in the abandoned city. He puts mankind into the Old Ones' shoes. Thus, the protagonist ends up showing pity on the Old Ones since he considers that the mural depicts the possible miserable future of mankind. However, the existence of the city itself does not make any sense to mankind. In that case, the mural may not serve the same function or illustrate the same meaning that Professor Dyer has interpreted. In my opinion, the vivid description of the Antarctic Cyclopean city indicates two things. First, no matter how hard the characters tried to express the grotesque extraterrestrial beings that they have witnessed, human language or human consciousness simply cannot surpass the gap. Second, the mighty ancient species from space not only exist in forms that are beyond human recognition, but they also employ a different set of knowledge which is nonsensical in the human eye. The narrator truly makes contact with the Antarctic city, but the features he has perceived and his interpretation may not refer to the meaning that it is supposed to be. In *At the Mountains of Madness*, Lovecraft gives lots of details about the construction, texture, shapes, and even the history of the Cyclopean city. The murals and carvings on the wall are clear enough that the narrator interprets them as the rise and fall of a mighty alien species. However, no matter how many details and pieces of evidence he gives, they cannot convey the shocking effect of witnessing the city itself in person. That is to say, the reality of the city itself is not the sum total of the features that the observer perceived. Shaviro mentions that "at any moment, then, the continuing existence of Cleopatra's

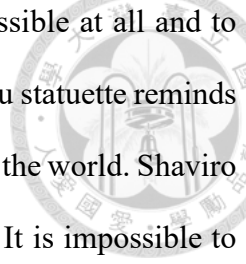


Needle is a new event” (WC 20). Through the example of Cleopatra’s Needle, he affirms that object is constantly changing. Every encounter with the object is a new event. In that case, objects will always withdraw. The only fact that we can make sure of is that there is an actual Cyclopean city presented in front of the character. The features that they described are tentative but real. According to Lovecraft’s description in *At the Mountains of Madness*, it is obvious that Lovecraftian objects are weird and monstrous. Yet, the unknown objects do not completely reject human perception. Causality still occurs between the Lovecraftian objects and the characters. Even though they may not interpret those features in the right way, their feelings about Lovecraftian things are genuine and real.

Third, the weird objects in Lovecraft’s writing demonstrate a kind of weird presence. Objects in Lovecraft’s works are mysterious and attractive. It feels that they are trying to allure other entities to make contact. It seems that characters in Lovecraft’s writing accidentally encounter those extraterrestrial beings and then go into delirium. But this is a common fallacy that comes from anthropocentric thinking. According to Lovecraft’s writing, most of those Lovecraftian objects already exist on earth long before mankind. They do not suddenly appear. Instead, they are always there without being discovered by mankind. In *The Call of Cthulhu*, the story begins with the narrator’s recollection of his accidental discovery of something too terrifying to be known by mankind. The manuscript of his dead uncle, George Gammell Angell, leads to the downfall of the naïve protagonist, Francis Wayland Thurston. The manuscript recorded Professor Angell’s research of a weird sculpture by Wilcox, who dreamed of the great Cyclopean cities and made this sculpture without consciousness. According to the notes, the history of the weird figure is exposed. This is not the first time that people witnessed this kind of idol that Wilcox made. Decades ago, a similar statuette appeared in the peculiar ritual of the dark cult in New Orleans. People considered the queer event

to be some sort of voodoo. However, through investigation, the narrator finds out the true history of the mysterious sculpture. He comes to know that this weird figure is created based on the shape of Cthulhu. Due to the recognition of the real existence of Cthulhu, which is a mighty existence that man cannot antagonize, the protagonist is afraid of the lurking force of Cthulhu and falls into despair.

In Lovecraft's world, the characters are entangled with monstrous nonhuman beings. Most of the time, the characters go into delirium or commit suicide because of the unbearable truth that humankind simply plays an insignificant role in the universe. In the story, Lovecraft gives several vivid descriptions of the form of the Cthulhu idol. "The nameless monstrosity" (*CFL* 385) comes from "the soapy, greenish-black stone" (*CFL* 389). The creature on the figure looks like some sort of mixture of an octopus, dragon, and human. The narrator believes that he "shall not be unfaithful to the spirit of the thing" because "the general outline of the whole" (*CFL* 383) reveals its monstrosity. Even though Lovecraft carefully describes the form of the idol, the spirit of Cthulhu rejects being represented by words or images. The general form of the statuette simply catches the sensual features of Cthulhu, but its reality cannot be exposed by any means. Among the survivors, Johansen and his crew are the only witnesses who truly encounter Cthulhu at the lost city of R'lyeh. He claims that "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" (*CFL* 405). The rise of Cthulhu not only brings an intolerable odor but leads the men to go across the threshold of reason. Johansen's episode reflects two points. First, the sculpture does not come out of the blue. It is made according to the form of Cthulhu. Second, Johansen's encounter with the Old Ones and Wilcox's sculpture proved that humans simply take a small part in the history of this planet. The encounters of those monstrous existences reveal Sperling's argument that "Lovecraft's work asks readers to contemplate how one comes to know



what one knows whether knowledge of the world is ever really possible at all and to imagine instead forms of nonhuman knowledge” (76).⁵⁰ The Cthulhu statuette reminds the reader of the entanglement of nonhuman objects with mankind in the world. Shaviro has argued that the world is “a finely articulated plenum” (*UT* 39). It is impossible to neglect the vigorous existence of nonhuman objects. The Cthulhu idol shows a weird presence that connects the observer to the world of those extraterrestrial beings. The statuette is not simply a representation of the image of Cthulhu. It also serves as a medium for the observer to contact the lurking Cthulhu. The narrator did not witness the real Cthulhu in person. His knowledge of the Cthulhu statuette comes from his uncle’s records and the descriptions of other witnesses. However, he sensed that there is eerie communication between him and the lurking Cthulhu. “Perception, feeling, and aesthetics are universal structures, not specifically for human ones” (*UT* 61). It is not only the narrator who perceived the features of the Cthulhu idol; the Cthulhu idol is also making contact with the narrator. There is also a weird aesthetic contact between the statuette and Cthulhu. According to Shaviro’s philosophy, causality occurs at the ontological level and before human consciousness. It is a dynamic process that happened before any cognition. In *The Call of Cthulhu*, the Cthulhu sculpture is a production of Wilcox in his dream. He states that “it is new, indeed, for I made it last night in a dream of strange cities” (*CFL* 384). He made this statuette while he was dreaming. He cannot explain why and how he creates this idol. This example shows that Wilcox already contacted Cthulhu before he made the sculpture. He already made contact with Cthulhu before his dream of the strange cities. This example reveals that the Cthulhu sculpture serves as an extension of the lurking Cthulhu. It is constantly

⁵⁰ Sperling, Alison. “H. P. Lovecraft’s Weird Body.” *Lovecraft Annual*, No. 10, 2016, pp. 75-100.

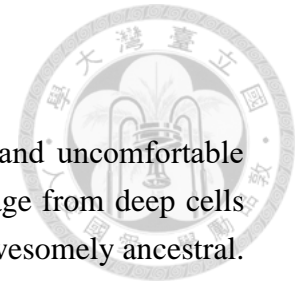
making contact with other entities on earth. It is not only Wilcox who makes contact with Cthulhu, but all the characters make contact with Cthulhu without consciousness.

The exotic tiara in *The Shadow over Innsmouth* also actively claims its existence. The nameless narrator accidentally discovers the hidden truth of his mother's parentage, which is a terrible recognition that he wishes he would never come to know. The narrator encounters the weird tiara at the exhibition. He is possessed by "the queer other-worldly quality of the art" (CFL 873). The tiara comes from a mysterious town, Innsmouth. Dragged by his deep interest in this mysterious town, the narrator boards the bus toward Innsmouth. Everything concerning Innsmouth is weird. The appearance of the residence is greyish. The town is barren. Despite the eerie atmosphere, the narrator desperately tries to dig for more stories of the "Devil Reef" (CFL 878), where people are said to have witnessed something evil. According to Zadok Allen's babble, he gets to know the history of the Deep Ones. The exotic tiara is kind of like the dowry of the Deep Ones. The ancestors of Innsmouth people got fortune and other advantages through miscegenation with the Deep Ones. Most of their posterity will be missing around the year of coming of age because they will gradually transform into the "Innsmouth look" (CFL 880) which is an irreversible change. The missing residents were said to be alive forever in the deep ocean. At the end of the story, the protagonist finds that one of his great-grandmother's inheritances is the exotic tiara. At that moment, he realizes his inevitable destiny. He is possessed by the unnamable fear of transformation.

The Shadow over Innsmouth expresses the irresistible power of the tiara and the cosmic horror that is hidden in our bodies. Despite the "freakishly elliptical outline" (CFL 873) of the tiara, there are different patterns of aesthetic judgment that take place in the story. The librarian merely views the tiara as something from an unknown exotic parentage. Yet, the narrator's first encounter with the tiara awakes something not from

his consciousness but deep in his body:

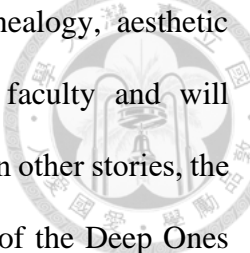
... which one could not dissociate from a certain haunting and uncomfortable sense of pseudo-memory, as if they were called up some image from deep cells and tissues whose retentive functions are wholly primal and awesomely ancestral. (CFL 873)



The encounter with the exotic object reminds the protagonist of something that was hidden in himself. According to Shaviro's framework, aesthetic judgment is a fundamental faculty in everything. Yet, in this story, there are different sets of aesthetic judgments. The narrator sensed the irregularity of this exotic object at first glimpse, but the librarian did not feel the same way. It is a weird question of who can "feel" the abnormality of those objects concerning the extraterrestrial civilizations in Lovecraft's stories. If the characters pay attention to these queer objects, they will undergo an irreversible change, which will guide them to cosmic horror that no man can endure. However, in *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, the exotic tiara reveals another kind of possibility. The tiara serves as evidence of the parentage of the Deep Ones. But the nameless narrator does not know anything about the Deep Ones before he witnesses the exhibit of the tiara. Yet ontologically he can sense the uniqueness of this exotic object, or he is attracted by his instinct to appreciate that.⁵¹

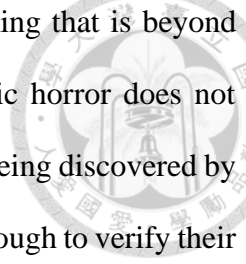
The narrator's drastic reaction to the tiara reveals two things. First, aesthetic judgment is a primordial faculty in everyone, but this faculty does not function democratically in everything. That is to say, we cannot analyze beauty that is beyond human knowledge but can simply view it as abnormal. The nameless narrator is fascinated by the tiara owing to his interwoven relationship with the species that creates

⁵¹ In Lovecraft's works, not every Lovecraftian object can be recognized by everyone. Like the narrator in *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, it is his lineage with the Deep Ones, that makes him sense the weirdness of the tiara. The issue of who can feel the differences of those Lovecraftian things will be discussed in the next chapter.



it. Even though the protagonist has no knowledge about his genealogy, aesthetic judgment simply takes place. Aesthetic judgment is the basic faculty and will necessarily be triggered at any time. Contra the “human” characters in other stories, the nameless narrator is potentially capable of understanding the craft of the Deep Ones since he is an offspring to them. However, man is always trapped in language and the finiteness of their being, which is an inevitable result that no one can deny. Thus, it is impossible to explain the beauty of this weird tiara. Furthermore, the existence of the tiara itself claims that cosmic horror does not always hide in the marginal place, such as the abandoned Antarctic city. It can be everywhere in human society. The exotic tiara proves that Lovecraftian objects demonstrate a weird presence that directly links to the monstrous extraterrestrial beings. The aesthetic contact between the narrator and the Deep Ones already occurred long before his witness of the tiara. Communication takes place at the ontological level. The witness of the tiara functions as the moment of recognition. Even if the narrator does not witness the tiara, the transformation in himself still goes on since “the causal powers possessed by things are entirely ontologically real” (*UT* 142).

To sum up, regardless of human consciousness, the strange objects in Lovecraft’s writing demonstrate the philosophy of the object which is not defined by human knowledge. Through his remarkable writing, Lovecraft shows the reader the cosmic horror that he himself believes to be the truth of the cosmos. Objects do not have to exist in a fixed pattern as people have defined. Despite the various forms of existence, objects are vigorous in Lovecraft’s writing. People are always entangled with these active things. In other words, it is not the cosmic horror that is always lurking in the background; rather, it is we, mankind, who have ignored their vigorous existence and unique power. The nameless color challenges our definition of the object. The Cthulhu sculpture and the giant fossils reflect life forms that are far too mightier than human



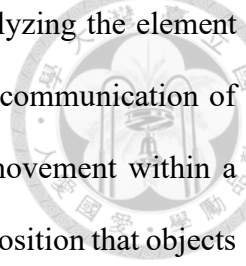
imagination. The Cyclopean city demonstrates another set of thinking that is beyond human understanding. The exotic tiara reveals the fact that cosmic horror does not always exist in deserted places. It has penetrated the world without being discovered by anyone. At least, anyone who discovered the fact never lived long enough to verify their discovery. These Lovecraftian objects not only subvert our recognition of the cosmos but demonstrate the weird ontology of how objects “feel” and “take account of” the environment. Moreover, in some cases, not every single entity can feel the weirdness of those Lovecraftian things. There are conditions in Lovecraft’s setting that is contrary to Shaviro’s presupposition that aesthetic contact occurs democratically at the ontological level. Some Lovecraftian objects express relatively stable states in the stories. Whether they all follow Shaviro’s presumption that objects are constantly changing in themselves will be an important issue in the following chapter. In the next chapter, I will discuss the issue in depth and pay attention to the differences between Lovecraft’s setting of the Lovecraftian objects and Shaviro’s speculative aesthetics.

Chapter Three

The Aesthetic Causality of objects in Lovecraft's Universe



In the previous chapter, I analyze the characteristics of the Lovecraftian things from the perspective of form, features, and their weird presence. The forms of Lovecraftian objects are definitely weird and beyond human understanding. The physical forms of those extraterrestrial beings challenge our knowledge of the universe. In addition to their strange appearance, Lovecraftian objects demonstrate features that human presupposes to be opposite or paradoxical. Human logic is not applicable to those beings from space. Consequently, the failure of science becomes a common element in Lovecraft's stories. Their weird presence is a problem that cannot be reckoned with. Even though the characters cannot access the reality of those Lovecraftian things, those eerie objects simply exist regardless of human will. At the ontological level, Lovecraftian things follow Shaviro's presupposition that there is a democratic space where the earthly object can communicate with extraterrestrial existence. But earthly objects make contact with extraterrestrial existence only if they fulfill certain preconditions. In the texts, it is obvious that not all characters can sense the weirdness of those extraterrestrial beings. Lovecraft's portrayal of those weird artistic objects and the working system of some extraterrestrial beings not only reveal the affinity between his ontology and Shaviro's speculative aesthetics but show a discrepancy between the two frameworks. As a result, in this chapter, I will closely analyze Lovecraft's presupposition of Lovecraftian beings and their differences from Shaviro's speculative aesthetics. I will pay attention to the issue of miscegenation and degeneration in Lovecraft's writing. In terms of the two issues, most Lovecraftian



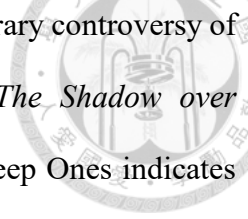
scholars, such as Adam Kozaczka⁵² and Joel Pace,⁵³ focus on analyzing the element of sexuality. I suggest that miscegenation involves the ontological communication of two different species and degeneration concerns the ontological movement within a species. Lovecraft's portrayal of the two issues expresses his presupposition that objects in his philosophy demand a precondition to contact, which differs from Shaviro's presumption that aesthetic causality is a democratic force in each object. Miscegenation presupposes the ontological communication between two species. But in Lovecraft's case, the element of cosmic horror, such as the lineage with the Deep Ones, works as a precondition to trigger this interaction. Likewise, degeneration in Lovecraft's works not only concerns the internal shifting within a single species but also indicates that the cosmic element already exists at the ontological level. In Lovecraft's writing, the element of cosmic horror serves as an ontological precondition for Lovecraftian things to make contact. In this chapter, I will explore the differences between Lovecraft's ontology and Shaviro's speculative aesthetics.

In Lovecraft's works, characters often reflect the author's philosophy of life including the contemporary social movements. In the stories, the controversial elements that embody the issue of miscegenation and degeneration give rise to the scholar's critique of Lovecraft as a racist. In "Shadows over Lovecraft: Reactionary Fantasy and Immigrant Eugenics," Bennett Lovett-Graff argues that:

Despite the careful veiling of anti-immigrant sentiments so obviously on display in earlier tales like "He" and "The Horror at Red Hook," Lovecraft cannot conceal behind the Deep Ones his clear dislike and fear of those immigrants whose racial stocks threatened the purer races of America. (182)

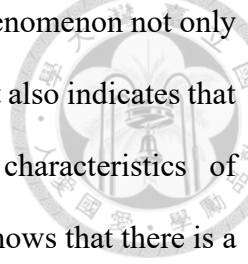
⁵² In "H. P. Lovecraft, Too Much Sex, and not Enough: Alan Moore's Playfully Repressive Hypothesis" Adam Kozaczka claims that Alan Moore's comic book unveils the issue of sexuality behind Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos, especially for the representation of sexuality in *The Shadow over Innsmouth*.

⁵³ In "Queer Tales? Sexuality, Race and Architecture in 'The Thing over Doorstep,'" Joel Pace analyzes the issue of sexuality in Lovecraft's writing. Based on Lovecraft's life experience and careful textual analysis, Pace makes successful research concerning sexuality in Lovecraftian studies.



The issue of interbreeding in Lovecraft's texts reflects the contemporary controversy of degeneration and the movements of eugenics in America. In *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, the protagonist's transformation into the form of the Deep Ones indicates the author's fear of degeneration and "the American fear of immigrants" (Lovett-Graff 175). Even though Lovecraft does not address the issue directly, the plots reveal the intrinsic anxiety of transforming into a hideous appearance. The fear of degeneration is clearly shown in *The Lurking Fear*. The protagonist suggests that "there can be nothing normal in the mind of one who, knowing what I knew of the horrors of Tempest Mountain, would seek alone for the fear that lurked there" (CFL 251-2). The narrator identifies the "whitish gorilla thing with sharp yellow fangs and matted fur" (CFL 256) to be the Martense family because of its one blue eye and the other brown, which is said to be the characteristic of the Martense family. The narrator comments that the degeneration of the Martense family is "the frightful outcome of isolated spawning, multiplication, and cannibal nutrition above and below the ground" (CFL 256). The narrator's comment reveals the intrinsic anxiety concerning the fear of degeneration. Unlike the narrator in *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, the protagonist in *The Lurking Fear* expresses his regard from the third person viewpoint. The first-person point of view in *The Shadow over Innsmouth* reflects that cosmic horror is not that far away from daily lives, while the third-person point of view in *The Lurking Fear* shows the intense negative ideology toward the contemporary debates over the theory of degeneration.

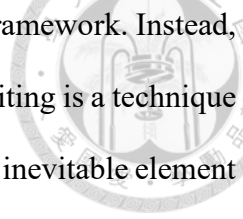
From the perspective of speculative aesthetics, the issue of degeneration in Lovecraft's works reveals that human characters possess some characteristics of extraterrestrial existence at the ontological level. Degeneration is a process that a species develops backward from its evolved state to its previous state. In other words, degeneration entails a dynamical change at the ontological level. The human characters



in *The Lurking Fear* degenerate into the state of the gorilla. This phenomenon not only reflects the intrinsic anxiety about the possibility of degeneration but also indicates that at the ontological level human shares a proportion of the characteristics of extraterrestrial existence. Moreover, the case in *The Lurking Fear* shows that there is a force of mobility that exists in objects. At the ontological level, this mobility leads to the degeneration of the Martense family. Shaviro's speculative aesthetics aims to propose "an aesthetic ontology that does justice both to objects and to process" (UT 12). He emphasizes both the constant internal change within each object and the external communication between different entities. In Lovecraft's writing, the process of degeneration refers to the dynamics of speculative aesthetics. The presupposition of degeneration in the Martense family shows that the part of the gorilla already lurks in them, or it is impossible for an isolated species to evolve a new element without any interaction with other species. The example of degeneration reveals that the elements of cosmic horror—the features of extraterrestrial beings—already exists in mankind. It also points out the ontological mobility within a single species during evolution.

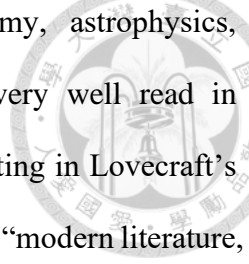
As for the problem of miscegenation, in "Why Michel Houellebecq is Wrong about Lovecraft's Racism," Joshi argues that Houellebecq's critique of Lovecraft as a racist is false and lacks evidence. He suggests that "Houellebecq has confused *indifference* and *hatred*" (44) in Lovecraft's writing. According to Lovecraft's letters, Joshi believes that Lovecraft is not a pessimist but an *indifferentist*. Lovecraft argues that:

I am *not a pessimist* but an *indifferentist*—that is, I don't make the mistake of thinking that the resultant of the natural forces surrounding and governing organic life will have any connexion with the wishes or tastes of any part of that organic life-processes. Pessimists are just as illogical as optimists; insomuch as both envisage the aims of mankind as unified, and as having a direct relationship (either of frustration or of fulfillment to the inevitable flow of terrestrial motivation and events. (SLIII 39)



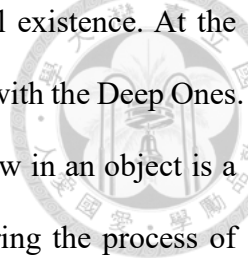
That is to say, Lovecraft does not shape his stories in a pessimistic framework. Instead, he creates those extraterrestrial beings on purpose. Realism in his writing is a technique of expression. As I have mentioned before, the failure of science is an inevitable element that Lovecraft employed on purpose in his writing. Houellebecq criticizes Lovecraft for rejecting realism because he proposes that “in his entire body of work, there is not a single allusion to two of the realities to which we generally ascribe great importance: sex and money. Truly not one reference” (qtd. Joshi 44-45). However, Joshi refutes this suggestion. Even though the issue of sex and money takes a minor part in Lovecraft’s description, it does not entail that he neglects the two elements. In *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, the nameless narrator turns out to be an offspring of the Deep Ones and mankind. The ancestral lineage is a significant issue in Lovecraft’s writing. Joshi mentions that “the unwholesome mating of fishlike creatures from the sea with humans is generally interpreted as a metaphor for Lovecraft’s disdain for ‘miscegenation’” (*Charles Baxter* 109-110). According to Joshi, this is not persuasive enough to be counted as evidence of miscegenation. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, cosmic horror is a kind of fear that is beyond human description. The human miscegenation with the Deep Ones, in my opinion, indicates that extraterrestrial beings do not exist in an isolated place. Cosmic horror is actually lurking in the background and always around us. Miscegenation reflects the issue of interaction between two distinct entities. According to Lovecraft’s description, the nameless narrator in *The Shadow over Innsmouth* is the offspring of the Deep Ones and mankind, which indicates the Deep Ones and humans can have a posterity. This fact presupposes that at a certain level the race of man and the Deep Ones make contact.

In addition to Houellebecq’s “simple-minded caricature” (*Charles Baxter* 108) of Lovecraft’s racism, the issue of realism is a significant emphasis in Lovecraft’s writing.



He keeps “closely abreast of the latest findings in astronomy, astrophysics, anthropology, and many other of the sciences, and was also very well read in contemporary philosophy” (Joshi *Topical References* 255). The setting in Lovecraft’s writing is not completely fictional and out of touch. His references to “modern literature, art, and the general aesthetic movements of his time” (Joshi *Topical References* 252) can be discovered in his several short stories. The character’s detailed description of the surroundings and the scientific dictions all indicate his intention of creating a realistic setting in the stories. The unknowable objects within the describable environment reveal the discrepancy between human knowledge and another set of natural laws from space. Realism in Lovecraft’s works not only serves to reflect the irrational existence of extraterrestrial beings but also implies his concern with contemporary movements.

Furthermore, I suggest that the issue of miscegenation can be reinterpreted from the perspective of speculative aesthetics. The offspring of the Deep Ones and mankind demonstrate the possibility of the ontological interaction between two different species. Shaviro mentions that Jane Bennett’s vital materialism is an idea that should not be ignored. In *Vibrant Matter*, Bennett proposes the concept of “Thing-power” (3). She aims to explore “a vitality intrinsic to materiality” (3), which is a force that exists at the ontological level. Bennett focuses on analyzing the capacity of inanimate objects to act upon other entities. Shaviro supports her attention on the force within inanimate objects. He argues that “vitality is unevenly distributed, but it is at work everywhere” which “is why the ‘democracy of objects’ is also a ‘democracy of fellow creatures’”(UT 63). That is to say, the ontological force that leads to causality fairly exists in every single entity. In *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, the narrator’s lineage with the Deep Ones shows that aesthetic judgment is not simply a “seemingly” democratic capacity, especially in Lovecraft’s writing. The narrator can sense the “difference” of the tiara because of his lineage with the Deep Ones. The lineage with the Deep Ones is the precondition of



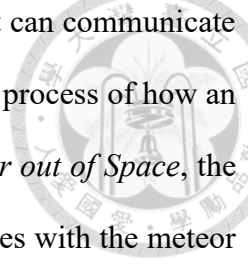
having the aesthetic judgment of the artwork of the extraterrestrial existence. At the ontological level, the narrator proves that humans can make contact with the Deep Ones. According to Shaviro's framework, the dynamics of ontological flow in an object is a continuous force that can equally affect the object it contacts. During the process of interaction, the two entities receive a different degree of effect. The force of aesthetic causality is not equally distributed to each entity. Despite the unevenly distributed aesthetic force, he proposes that it is a democratic "ability" for each object to communicate with other entities at the ontological level. Furthermore, he suggests that the dynamics of ontological contact involves a mode of decision. According to his interpretation of Whitehead's philosophy, a decision is a spontaneous act that "cannot be predicted or determined in advance" (UT 39). However, in Lovecraft's ontology, the aesthetic force that interacts with other entities is not a directly democratic one. Humans can only access a specific level when they communicate with extraterrestrial existence. In other words, Lovecraft's ontology expresses the weird features of objects and a conditional interaction between two entities. Humans can involve in this kind of conditional causal relationship, but it must be selective. The act of decision entails a kind of precondition during the process of causality. The precondition of selection⁵⁴ in Lovecraft's ontology indicates a working system that is different from Shaviro's democratic aesthetic causality. The case in *The Shadow over Innsmouth* indicates the ontological mobility between two different species. The communication between two species is not completely restricted. The lineage simply serves as a trigger of the causal relationship between the Deep Ones and mankind. The weirdness appears at the ontological level in Lovecraft's aesthetics due to the precondition before contact. In Lovecraft's universe, not all the characters are able of interacting with those weird

⁵⁴ The word "selection" refers to an object's ability to make responses to the environment at the ontological level. Human consciousness does not involve in this process.

artistic objects. In some cases, they need to fulfill some preconditions. The selection concerns the ancestral lineage in *The Shadow over Innsmouth*. But in other stories, the selection involves other issues.

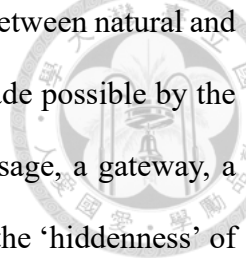
In Lovecraft's stories, there are various preconditions concerning communication with extraterrestrial beings. I suggest that the offspring of the Deep Ones and mankind positively reveal Lovecraft's attitude toward the communication between the known entity and the unknown being. In *The Call of Cthulhu*, the influence of Cthulhu does not immediately show on the characters after the dreams of Cthulhu. In the story, Wilcox is not the only person who dreams of the Cyclopean city and the forms of Cthulhu. During a certain period, people all over the world dream of those extraterrestrial civilizations. It is a matter of time before those affected characters go into delirium.⁵⁵ That is to say, everyone in Lovecraft's world is in the process of being affected by Lovecraftian things. Some characters keep their reason but somehow, they will be overwhelmed by those Lovecraftian things. As a result, in Lovecraft's stories, the philosophy of the universe is never human-oriented and human-based. The objects are always lurking in the background. Aesthetic force is a democratic ability in Shaviro's framework. He believes that even though the interaction between two objects is asymmetric, the capacity for aesthetic contact exists in every single entity. Nevertheless, the ontological aesthetic contact demonstrates a slightly different possibility in Lovecraft's ontology. Lovecraftian things require a specific precondition at the ontological level; their criteria are irregular and weird. Therefore, I propose that in Lovecraft's writing aesthetic contact is a democratic force at the ontological level, but each Lovecraftian object makes different responses to this capacity.

⁵⁵ This suggestion comes from the discussion with my advisor, Professor Yung-Chao Liao, on 24 September 2022. Everyone in Lovecraft's stories is under the influence of Lovecraftian things.



In addition to the weird presence and the ontological force that can communicate with other entities, objects in Lovecraft's universe demonstrates the process of how an unknown object makes responses to the environment. In *The Colour out of Space*, the ways of distortion of different entities reveal that the thing that comes with the meteor is trying to adapt itself to the environment. Harman suggests that the description of the distorted flowers in *The Colour out of Space* is a classic Lovecraftian vertical gap which refers to the "rift between some underlying reality and the incapacity of language to express it adequately" (WR 89). The reader simply knows that "the asters and goldenrod bloomed grey and distorted" (CFL 647). But the reader is not informed how the flowers are distorted and what kinds of "blasphemous-looking things" (CFL 647) these flowers are. The distorted flowers clearly reflect this vertical rift. Moreover, Harman argues that "the color spreads its malign influence, yet must always adapt to the local condition of the host it inflects" (WR 93). That is, even though the color itself follows another set of the natural law of space, it still has to adapt itself to the natural law on earth when it tries to affect things on earth. Based on Harman's interpretation, it is clear that the reality of this unnamable color is inaccessible and can only be inferred through Lovecraft's remarkable writing style. Different ways of distortion of different flowers show that this weird spectrum is not changeless. Needless to say, this wired spectrum makes a different reaction in animals. Due to different hosts, it presents various effects. Lovecraft's careful portrayal of the strange color reflects his attention on the capability of objects and his ambition to shape a kind of life form that is beyond human understanding but not completely out of touch.

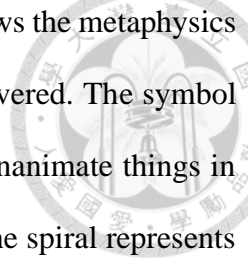
Moreover, in the previous chapter, I proposed that Lovecraftian objects demonstrate a kind of weird presence that violates mankind's presupposition of the ontology of objects. I would like to elaborate on the issue of presence in-depth. In Eugene Thacker's *In the Dust of this Planet*, he discusses the function of the magic



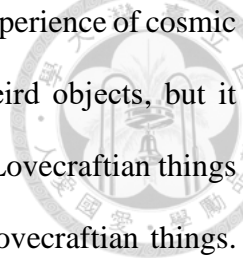
circle in literature. He suggests that the magic circle is “a boundary between natural and supernatural, and the possible mediations between them that are made possible by the circle itself” (85), which is not simply a boundary “but also a passage, a gateway, a portal” (85). In literature, the magic circle is a division that “allows the ‘hiddenness’ of the world to reveal itself, as well as that which protects the human subject from the rational unacceptability of this hidden, world-in-itself” (101). Thacker argues that when “the human subjects ‘in’ the magic circle struggle to control and comprehend that which lies outside of it” (113), the boundary between natural and supernatural will be blurred gradually. He proposes that the narrator in Lovecraft’s “From Beyond” creates a magic circle that works to dissolve the boundary between natural and supernatural. The magic circle undergoes a transformation into the form of “science and technology” (116-117 Thacker) in Lovecraft’s stories. Furthermore, there is a final transformation of the magic circle which “is diffused into the world” (118 Thacker). According to Thacker’s discussion, the weird manifestation of the spiral in Ito’s manga series *Uzumaki* reveals that the spiral corresponds to “thought” (121) itself. The spiral not only serves as a symbol of a pattern but is contagious, which means it is capable of making contact with other entities. He suggests that both Lovecraft and Ito try to convey the idea that:

Not only is there no distinction between the natural and supernatural, but that what we sloppily call “supernatural” is simply another kind of nature, but one that lies beyond human comprehension – not in a relative but in an absolute sense. (122)

The absolute, in Thacker’s viewpoint, refers to Lovecraft’s idea of “cosmic horror.” The hidden world of the spiral indicates the concept of the world-without-us which is equivalent to the philosophy of the objects. As a result, no matter in Ito’s or in Lovecraft’s stories, the vigorous existence of objects is the emphasis of the texts.



Additionally, the weird manifestation of the spiral not only shows the metaphysics of the object but reveals the ambitious will of the spiral to be discovered. The symbol of the spiral shows up everywhere in the town. Both animate and inanimate things in the town are gradually affected by the spiral. The intrusiveness of the spiral represents its ambitious attempt to be discovered by the outside world. In *At the Mountains of Madness*, the presence of the mirage also reflects the declaration of the existence of the Cyclopean city. A mirage is a kind of physical phenomenon that a distant object shows its appearance due to the refraction of the light. The observer mistakenly judges the distance between him and the image of the mirage. It is the formation of the mirage that deceives the observers into believing the image they saw. However, I suggest that the images of the mirage concern the weird presence of Lovecraftian things. On the surface level, the mirage does not seem to actively present itself to the outside. But its existence is attractive enough to lure the observer to search for its real location. Even though the mirage of the ancient city always shows itself at a distance from the characters, it is the same mirage that brings about Professor Dyer and Danforth's madness at the end of the story. At the end of the story, Professor Dyer reveals that "all that Danforth has ever hinted is that the final horror was a mirage" (*MM* 126). Danforth claims that the thing he witnessed is a mirage. However, the cosmic horror that leads to his delirium is something beyond description and beyond human understanding. He can only argue that the cosmic horror he witnessed is a mirage. The alien city simply exists in the freezing aeon and is surrounded by the dark high mountain that no man has ever landed before. Professor Dyer's discovery of the Cyclopean city reveals that the mirages he saw are not a mixture of the distant view but a reflection of the abandoned alien city. The presence of the mirage gives the observer a hint of the existence of the Cyclopean city. As I have mentioned in the second chapter, Lovecraft's portrayal of those weird objects reveals his critique of the epistemology of science. The presence of the mirage



reflects his imagination of the infinite possibility of existence. The experience of cosmic horror refers to the observer's internal representation of those weird objects, but it cannot be equal to the real object. Even though the lurking force of Lovecraftian things is omnipresent, the characters cannot always sense the threat of Lovecraftian things. The emergence of the mirage serves as a temptation to lure the characters and claims its existence. When the characters are attracted by the mirage, they will be haunted by the force of cosmic horror.

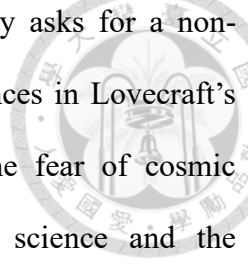
In terms of Lovecraft's description of extraterrestrial existence, not all extraterrestrial beings in Lovecraft's writing can be represented by words. In *The Call of Cthulhu*, the form of Cthulhu sculpture is clearly described. But it is "the general outline of the whole" (CFL 383) that shapes the fear of the unknown. The cosmic horror that comes from the Cthulhu idol cannot be conveyed by human language. In *At the Mountains of Madness*, Professor Dyer's description of the Cyclopean city also indicates the ambiguous state of the alien civilization. In addition to mathematical terms, he uses lots of negative sentences to depict the alien city standing in front of him. He claims that "the effect was subtly menacing in a way I can never hope to depict" (MM 61). The way he described the city shows that he can only depict his sensual perception of the city. But the reality of the city rejects to be expressed by words. As I have discussed in the first chapter, Harman's philosophy cannot well-explain Lovecraft's ontology. At the ontological level, Lovecraftian things make contact with mankind. Shaviro's speculative aesthetics is more suitable to explore the dynamics of the ontological aesthetic force. But in Lovecraft's story, not everyone can sense the weirdness of Lovecraftian things. The case in *The Shadow over Innsmouth* reveals that even though human consciousness is restricted, at the ontological level the tiara still makes contact with the narrator. The discrepancy between Lovecraft's ontology and Shaviro's speculative aesthetics is that the aesthetic contact is conditional and weird.

The capacity of aesthetic causality exists in every single object, but each Lovecraftian thing has its own interpretation⁵⁶ of this ability. Therefore, the working system of objects in Lovecraft's writing is unpredictable. They preserve the ontological aesthetic capacity but make different responses at the moment of contact.

Additionally, not every Lovecraftian thing possesses a substantial body. The thing that comes with the meteor in *The Colour out of Space* serves as the best example. The existence of the weird spectrum itself rejects to be represented by words. Color is the product of human sensual perception. The weird spectrum shows a strange color that is beyond description. The characters can only refer to it by analogy. Through this example, it is obvious that even though Lovecraft makes effort to portray his extraterrestrial beings, it requires the reader's imagination to make up the images of those strange beings. Lovecraftian things always demonstrate their existence in a speculative state. People can only describe their sensual perception of those weird objects with words. Yet, language is not the key to the working system of aesthetic causality. It simply catches the sensual features that humans can perceive. It is not involved in the dynamics of ontological aesthetic causality. Even though the medium, such as language and image, in the sensual realm cannot influence the causal relationship which occurs at the ontological level, the character's perception of Lovecraftian things disturbs their mind. The weird presence of Lovecraftian things challenges the observer's understanding of the world. Above all, it is obvious that Lovecraft shapes a complicated working system of objects. The universe of things is energetic and weird in Lovecraft's universe.

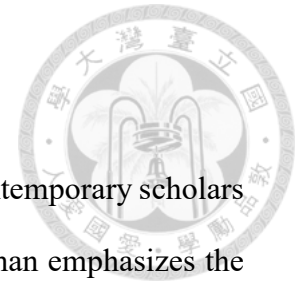
As a result, it is obvious to find that Shaviro's speculative aesthetics cannot well-explain the ontology of Lovecraftian objects. Lovecraftian things demonstrate the weird

⁵⁶ The word "interpretation" does not imply the capacity of consciousness in objects that panpsychism proposes. It simply refers to the object's ability to respond to the environment.



precondition of objects before contact. If object-oriented ontology asks for a non-anthropocentric viewpoint of the object, the extraterrestrial existences in Lovecraft's writing inform the readers of the philosophy of the object. The fear of cosmic experiences originates from the character's firmly believe in science and the anthropocentric ideology of the world. The Lovecraftian objects unveil the hidden nature of the object that mankind presupposes to be absurd. Through Lovecraft's description of extraterrestrial existence, human gets a glimpse of the ontology and the working system of objects. It is impossible to fully understand something since objects are constantly changing in themselves. But at the ontological level, the causal relationship between objects still takes place. Lovecraft's ontology shapes a universe of objects which demonstrates the uncertainty of forms and speculative features in them. At the ontological level, they communicate with the ontology of the characters. Therefore, Shaviro's speculative aesthetics would be more suitable to investigate Lovecraft's works. In Lovecraft's writing, humans need to fulfill specific preconditions, such as ancestral lineage, in order to interact with Lovecraftian things. This kind of precondition serves as a system of selection before interaction. The weirdness shows itself at the ontological level in Lovecraft's ontology. In other words, aesthetic force is a democratic capacity in Lovecraft's works, but each Lovecraftian thing has a different interpretation of this ability. The Lovecraftian things cannot be fully accessed by language, but the causal relationship still takes place. The place where causality occurred exists at a certain level of the ontological structure. The weird precondition in Lovecraft's ontology supplement Shaviro's framework of aesthetic causality. The weird objects in his writing demonstrate that object also makes a selection at the moment of contact. The Lovecraftian things show the reader that the universe of objects has a sophisticated working system that is beyond human knowledge. The philosophy of objects is speculative and unpredictable.

Conclusion



To sum up, the school of object-oriented ontology provides contemporary scholars another angle to probe Lovecraft's universe. As a forerunner, Harman emphasizes the quadruple structure of each entity and pays attention to the dynamics of objects. He believes that the fundamental fracture between the sensual realm and the real realm can never be conquered by anything. People can only indirectly access the reality of objects by metaphor and Lovecraft's description of extraterrestrial existence serves as the best example to prove his framework. Contra Harman, Shaviro proposes a different viewpoint. He considers the reality of objects to be withdrawn from human consciousness, but at the ontological level contact between two entities still occurs. That is, the aesthetic force exists in each object, which is a democratic force that gives rise to the causal relationship. Nevertheless, Lovecraft's ontology cannot be fully explained by either Harman's or Shaviro's framework.

Lovecraftian things demonstrate three significant characteristics. Firstly, the forms of creatures and the shapes of their artistic objects are unusual. The appearance of Cthulhu, the elliptical tiara, the weird spectrum, etc. overthrow our understanding of creatures and redefine the meaning of an object. Especially for the weird spectrum, it challenges our definition that an object should have a physical existence. The color of human sensual perception can be a kind of life form which is intrusive and contagious. Secondly, Lovecraftian things express strange features that are beyond human understanding. The tough but flexible torso of the Old Ones and the color beyond description reflect that there is nothing impossible in the universe. The features that human presupposes to be paradoxical can show on a single entity. Thirdly, the weird presence of the Lovecraftian things is amazing and attractive to the characters. In one sense, these characteristics verify Shaviro's presupposition of speculative aesthetics.

That is, objects are always changing, and causality happens at the ontological level. Aesthetics is the root of the causal relationship.

However, Lovecraftian objects do not always follow Shaviro's principle. In terms of the issue of degeneration and miscegenation, Lovecraft indicates that the elements of cosmic horror already exist in us. The ontological movement reveals that Lovecraftian things require a precondition to make contact. Objects in Lovecraft's philosophy are speculative, and their weirdness appears at the ontological level. But there is a gap in Lovecraft's narratives which embodies both Harman's fundamental fracture and Shaviro's ontological aesthetic force. This is an issue that cannot be solved by simply employing Shaviro's speculative aesthetics. It takes more textual analysis of Lovecraft's works and other revisions to his framework to deal with this problem. This thesis focuses on the weird aesthetics in Lovecraft's ontology. Weird aesthetics is a significant issue in Lovecraft's research, but it has not yet been valued. Thus, this thesis will serve as a starting point to explore the underlying structure of Lovecraft's weird aesthetics. The details concerning the working system of his weird aesthetics are still waiting to be explored.

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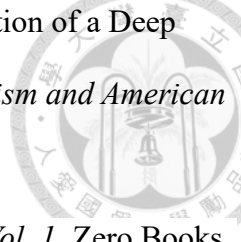


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