

Whitehead and Media Ecology: Toward a Communicative Cosmos

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ABSTRACT: This article brings media ecology into conversation with Alfred North Whitehead's philosophy of organism in an effort to lure the former beyond its normally anthropocentric orientation. The article is divided into two parts. Part 1 spells out the way Whitehead's approach can aid media ecology in developing a less anthropocentric theory of communication. Part 2 engages more specifically with Mark B. N. Hansen's Feed-Forward: On the Future of Twenty-First-Century Media. Hansen's work is an example of the exciting new directions opened up for media theory by Whitehead's panexperientialist ontology, but I argue that Hansen's attempt to "invert" Whitehead's theory of perception is based on a terminological confusion.

“Not all communication is human communication. Animals and machines, atoms and the earth, the seas and the stars are themselves full of curious communications, and our efforts to have intelligence with such entities reform our own practices as well. A vision of communication committed to democracy cannot foreclose on entering into intelligence with radical otherness, including the earth, other species, machines, or extraterrestrial life.”

—John Durham Peters, “Space, Time,
and Communication Theory”

“We find ourselves in a buzzing world, amid a democracy of fellow creatures.”

—Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, p. 50

This article attempts to expand the scope of media ecology beyond its ordinarily humanistic horizon by drawing it into dialogue with Alfred North Whitehead's organic cosmology. Neil Postman defined media ecology as the critical study of how media technologies envelope and form cultures (161). As McLuhan and Nevitt famously put it, “Man is an extension of nature that re-makes the nature that makes the man” (*Take* 66). This definition of media ecology is premised on the idea that human

beings have a foot in two different worlds: a natural or physical environment that includes our own living bodies and a media environment that extends our embodied expressions into a technologically supported but in itself nonmaterial space of meaning. Each form of communication technology (e.g., speech, the alphabet, the printing press, radio, TV, the Internet, etc.) creates a surrogate nature, an artificial environment within which new cultures grow, sometimes deformed due to their alienation from and lack of resonance with original nature. Today, largely because of this lack of resonance, we find ourselves the late capitalist denizens of a planet in crisis. Geologists, Gaian physiologists, and posthuman theorists tell us that we have entered the Anthropocene. Technological civilization, in its rush to establish a new and improved second nature on top of the first, has neglected to consider that first nature—the Earth—is not a mere stockpile of raw material waiting to fuel the growth and innovation of the human economy but is instead a complex ecopoietic hyperorganism (see Thompson 120–22). The planetary ecological crisis has made the modern theory of a bifurcated nature obsolete. Cultural creations and biophysical processes, even if once separable in thought, have, in the Anthropocene, become irrevocably entangled at a geochemical level. Our species' ability to understand and respond to the planetary ecological crisis may be aided by a truly *ecological* media ecology, that is, by the idea that there is not just an analogical resonance between natural ecologies and media ecologies but a cosmological community.¹ Whitehead's panexperientialist cosmology allows us to generalize media ecology's focus on the medium instead of the message, such that *the world itself is brought into view as a medium of communication*. Perhaps such an imaginative generalization of media ecology into an *ecological metaphysics* or *metaphysics of the medium* can sensitize us to the primal logos of the cosmos.

This work is already well underway, carried forward by theorists including Jussi Parikka, John D. Peters, Adam Robbert, Andrew Murphie, and, as we will see in part 2, Mark B. N. Hansen. They each turn to Whitehead's metaphysical scheme in search of a more cosmological media ecology. Recognizing that humans represent only one of the cosmos' many forms of communicative being, and that the storage, transmission, and transformation of meaning occur at every scale—from the quantum to the geological to the galactic—new theoretical perspectives on and practical interventions into the study of media as environment and environment as media open up. Becoming conscious of a communicative cosmos has profound technological, ecological, and theological implications.

In part 1, I invite media theory beyond its human horizon into a more cosmological study of communication as such. In part 2, I engage more specifically with Mark Hansen's *Feed Forward*, arguing that his "inversion" of Whitehead is an unnecessary radicalization of an already radical theory of perception.

Part 1

McLuhan and Postman theorized media largely from an anthropocentric perspective (i.e., media as "extensions of man"). There is much to be learned from such a perspective. But it is not the only perspective from which to study media. Unlike Postman, with his prophet-like criticisms of new media's deleterious effects on contemporary culture,² McLuhan's Catholic faith sometimes led him to offer a more theologically charged take on electronic media. He went so far as to suggest that what we now call the Internet may be the technological incarnation of the mystical body of Christ. On the other hand, he worried that electronic media might just be Satan's latest temptation. God also has an important role to play in Whitehead's media theory, though not simply as a subject of religious worship, but additionally as a metaphysical principle providing coherence to his cosmological scheme. For Whitehead, God is the infinite actuality that introduces ideal harmony or aesthetic order into the world, making cosmos out of chaos by providing the initial aim or erotic lure conditioning every finite creative act: God "is the mirror which discloses to every creature its own greatness" (*RM* 139). Whitehead's is an aesthetic theory of cosmic becoming wherein God suffers with the world as its tragic poet, rather than existing beyond as its transcendent cause.

McLuhan said of all media prior to electronic technologies that they were "extensions" or "prostheses" of the human being, but with the emergence of digital media and the Internet, an uncanny reversal seems to be occurring: *the human is becoming an extension of media*. Already in the 1960s, McLuhan was pointing out the ways that human life was being translated into information (*Understanding* 57). Today, digital media are being characterized as environmental, elemental, atmospheric, and "cloud"-like because they surround and dissolve our classical conception of human autonomy. Digitally mediated information is now the most powerful weapon in the world, as the governments, corporations, and anonymous hackers who wield it have the ability to shape our collective perceptions and actions, even while we continue to believe we are free individuals thinking for ourselves. The situation is decidedly

double-edged: we have instantaneous access to more information about each other and the world than ever before in human history, and yet all that data also has access to us.

Whether we call it the information revolution, the technozoic era, or the Anthropocene, it is clear that our species has become a planetary force on par with supervolcanoes and meteorites. Just as this realization begins to dawn on us, media theorists are articulating a “non-anthropocentric, non-prosthetic, and radically environmental theory of media” (Hansen 250). Several contemporary theorists are bringing media theory into conversation with Whitehead’s panexperientialism in order to reimagine the ontology of media. Such a reimagination is part of an effort to undo the modern bifurcation of nature. The bifurcated theory of nature has it that nature is a soundless, scentless, colorless affair, with all experience and interpretation, all emotion and purpose, all value and agency, reserved for the human (or for God for those still religious). Media theory has tended to treat human perception as though it existed in an ontologically enclosed domain outside mere material existence: humans and their technologies do the mediating, while nature itself remains passively mediated. As part of a protest against the bifurcation of nature, Whitehead articulated a radical account of perception wherein the affective inheritance of our own just past bodily experience becomes an analogy for all of nature’s causal transactions. Human temporality, even if uniquely dilated and intricately folded, is still continuous with the temporalities of the rest of the universe. For Whitehead, the ultimate concrete facts composing nature are nonconscious acts of perceptivity, or what he calls “actual occasions of experience.” Actual occasions are unified compositions or “concrescences” of specific forms of feeling called “prehensions” (*RM* 88, 91). Actual occasions are the momentary achievement of a subjectively valued perspective on the cosmos. All causal efficacy in nature is the transmission of intensities of feeling from the settled past into the cresting wave of the present. Once an actual occasion’s present form has prehended the feelings of its past and reached the completion of its concrecence, its perceptivity perishes and it offers itself as an expression feeding the emergence of subsequent prehensive actualities. In Whitehead’s terms:

Expression is the one fundamental sacrament . . . the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. . . . [T]he recipient extends his apprehension of the ordered universe by penetrating into the inward nature of the originator of the expression. There is then

a community of intuition by reason of the sacrament of expression proffered by one and received by the other. (*RM* 118).

Where McLuhan described the “miracle” whereby “in ordinary perception we incarnate the exterior world, because human perception is literally incarnation” (*Medium* 169), Whitehead goes further by arguing that “[e]very event on its finer side introduces God into the world,” such that “the world lives by its incarnation of God in itself” (*RM* 140). Expression and prehension are the systole and diastole movements of cosmic creativity, the call and response between God and the world. Every creature, whether atomic, galactic, biotic, or anthropic, is privy in various degrees to this conversation. McLuhan’s theological intuitions already offer media ecology one way beyond its ordinarily anthropocentric charter. But by accepting some version of the bifurcation of nature, McLuhan falls short of the “becoming-cosmological of media” (Hansen 244) that is achieved by Whitehead. Media theory’s founding insight, that “the medium is the message,” must be translated into cosmology.

Adam Robbert offers a fruitful translation in the form of a “geocentric media ecology”: the Earth, rather than remaining the passive ground upon which human communication transpires, is reimaged as “a *medium* that constrains and conditions the energetic cascade of organismic and ecosystemic development” (6). Along similar lines, Jussi Parikka suggests that “the Earth as living creature communicates via the assembled resources it fashions and provides” (“The Geology”). Parikka offers his own translation of “the medium is the message” into cosmology via a psychogeophysical inquiry into the memories of rocks, raising an issue “anyone deep into Alfred North Whitehead would find attractive”: “How do the soil, the crust, the rocks, and the geological world sense?” (*A Geology* 62–65). Such questions may seem odd at first, but they are an invitation to consider anew the ontological implications of the way natural sciences like geology and astronomy have taught us so much about the cosmos by treating it as a kind of recording medium. In line with his search for an elemental theory of media, John Durham Peters asks what would happen to media theory if the semiotically fecund processes of the natural world were recognized as the epitome of meaning, rather than the speech and writing of human beings (380). Peters approaches the cosmologization of media theory by calling for an “infrastructural aesthetics” to replace both structuralism (the ambition to “explain the principles of thought . . . by way of a combinatorics of meaning”) and poststructuralism (“with its love of

gaps, aporias, and impossibilities, its celebration of breakdown, yearning, and failure, its relish for preposterous categories of all kinds and love of breathless syntax”) (33). Infrastructural aesthetics lifts the taken-for-granted background of our human living and dying into the foreground, bringing that which habitual use and abuse has made imperceptible out from behind the veil and into view. Whitehead’s method of speculative philosophy could be described likewise, as for him metaphysics is the pursuit of those generalities so finely woven into the texture of our everyday experience that they become “obscured by their persistent exemplification” (*PR* 5). “It requires a very unusual mind to undertake an analysis of the obvious” (*SMW* 4), which perhaps explains why philosophy is such a rare vocation. But for Whitehead, philosophy must not become the enemy of habitual commonsense. Infrastructural ignorance has been an essential component of our species’ uniquely powerful form of intelligence: “Civilization advances by extending the number of important operations which we can perform without thinking about them” (*IM* 61). Instead, philosophy must deploy the method of “imaginative rationalization” (*PR* 5) to seek out and make explicit the unacknowledged cosmological presuppositions that ground and justify our civilized commonsense. Infrastructural aesthetics is the effort to bring to light the vibrant materiality of the media underlying the ephemerality of the messages they convey. It is the effort to unearth the way the ground we walk on supports and enables our understanding of media, our communicative capacity, our consciousness, and our very being. According to Peters, “Ontology, whatever else it is, is usually just forgotten infrastructure” (38). In a discussion of Einsteinian cosmology, Peters refers to the way “infrastructural warps can be embraced as epistemic sources” (364). In other words, the red shift and gravity lensing detected in ancient/distant light signals tells us something important about the texture of the universe. Distortions in these cosmic messages, far from ruining our ability to decipher their meaning, communicate something significant to us about the medium of space-time itself, that light is not just a carrier of signals but the warp and weft of cosmic becoming: “Time, the universe’s key dimension, is tied to signal velocity, and ontology is bound by the finitude of communication” (Peters 366, 368).

Whitehead’s philosophy of organism allows a radical new possibility to become thinkable—that the world can be reimagined as a medium because the cosmos is composed of communicative processes at every scale. The world itself has always been, in Whitehead’s terms, “a medium

for the transmission of influences” (*PR* 286). Ironically, according to Andrew Murphie, “the idea that there’s too much mediation (a world over-run by media which would otherwise run smoothly) leads media theory and practice astray,” since, as Whitehead’s philosophy reveals, “[w]e have too small a concept of mediation” (Murphie 11n11).

Cosmologizing media theory means finally letting go of the Cartesian-Kantian framework that extends mere matter forever beyond a meaning-intending mind. The natural world is semiotic through and through, but because most of its meaning has thus far escaped us, moderns have concluded that it is not there. Peters points to the dynamic patterns in DNA, invertebrate nervous systems, electromagnetic radiation, chemistry, and flowing water as examples of more than human loci of meaning, arguing that intelligence is active at all scales in nature, not just in human brains (381).

Such a scale-free conception of intelligence requires a more general theory of communication (indeed, a more *general* general semantics!) than that which supposes the paradigm case of communication is one human mind trying to convey a thought to another. With a truly (and not just metaphorically) ecologized media theory, we can come to see that the prehuman world was always already a medium for the transmission of “data.” Humans are not just now being transformed into information by digital media; like the universe, we were always already made of self-interpreting information. For Whitehead, a bit of information, a *datum*, is a “potential for feeling” (*PR* 88), and every potential seeks satisfaction through actualization in an occasion of experience.

Of course, there is much that remains to be unpacked. This article is an invitation to media theorists to consider new avenues of research beyond the human sphere. I draw this section to a close with a plea to media theorists to join Whitehead’s protest against the bifurcation of nature. Contrary to McLuhan’s argument that languaging humans are unique among biological organisms in that we “[possess] an apparatus of transmission and transformation based on [our] power to store experience” (*Understanding* 59), Whitehead’s organic cosmology invites us to recognize that the transmission and transformation of experience is the very basis of causal connection throughout the universe. Human language is just a further elaboration upon this cosmic capacity for communicative transaction. I say to McLuhan: Yes, there is a *logos* in the *anthropos*, there is a living God at the heart of our human perception and symbolism—a Spirit runneth through our alphabetic letters. But there is another *logos*:

a *logos* of the *cosmos*. Thus, there is a need for a *cosmological* media theory, not just an anthropological or theological one.

Part 2

Mark Hansen's *Feed Forward: On the Future of Twenty-First-Century Media* is densely argued and full of important correctives to the antihuman and posthuman tendencies of many contemporary theorists. While he accepts the call for an anthrocentric philosophy, Hansen does not seek to "eschew contact with humans" entirely, as though ontology could ever be completely purified of our existence (15). Rather, he aims to "resituate," "intensify," and even "enhance" human experience by bringing it back into contact with the "causally efficacious lineages that have produced it" (Hansen 9, 15). As technological societies become increasingly immersed in and saturated by new forms of digital media, Hansen fears that our species is at risk of being drowned in data. Computer networks are increasingly linking the world together, leaving vanishingly few domains free of their reach. Artificially intelligent sensing systems, including the smart phones in our pockets, are fundamentally transforming the meaning and scope of our experience. The majority of our day-to-day lives is now mediated by machines that function at temporalities beyond our direct perceptual grasp. These machines thus alter our behavior without our being aware of it (Hansen 23).

Hansen argues that Whitehead's reembedding of human perception in a continuum of cosmic vibration provides a radical corrective to bifurcated Cartesian-Kantian accounts of the relationship between physical processes and human consciousness, a corrective that may help us meet the challenges posed by twenty-first-century digital media. But Hansen's reading of Whitehead, assisted by Judith Jones's beautiful and important book *Intensity*, positions itself as an "inversion" of Whitehead's ontology, which Hansen argues is still residually anthropocentric.³ Much of what Hansen proposes leans heavily on Jones's work, even though she only claims to be offering a slight revision and reemphasis of concepts already present in Whitehead's texts (Jones x). Hansen summarizes the reasons for his "inversion" of Whitehead's ontology by claiming that, for Whitehead, only concrescence, or the active growing together of prehensive feelings into a unified subjective perspective on the cosmos, is granted creative power, while perished occasions transition into the settled past as mere objects (or "superjects" in Whitehead's usage) that remain passively inert until taken up into future concrescences (13).

This is a misleading reading of the way the concepts of concrescence and transition are deployed in Whitehead's process-relational ontology. In *Adventures of Ideas*, Whitehead characterizes objects as *antecedent* and *given* to newly concrescing occasions, but definitely "not . . . generated in that occasion" (179). The new occasion "does not create the objects which it receives," as actual occasions do not "[arise] out of a passive situation which is a mere welter of many data" (*AI* 179). Precisely the opposite is the case, since "the initial situation includes a factor of *activity* which is the reason for the origin [of the new] occasion of experience" (*AI* 179; emphasis added). Contrary to Hansen's one-sided interpretation of Whitehead's process-relational ontology, objects are not understood to be inert and left to die into the past; rather, Whitehead attributes to them an expressive capacity that itself serves as the primary phase of each new occasion's entrance into the present. "The creative process is thus to be discerned in that transition by which one occasion, already actual, enters into the birth of another instance of experienced value" (*RM* 99).

Hansen develops a nonprosthetic account of digital media in terms of what he calls *worldly sensibility*. Instead of attributing all agency and creativity to human consciousness, Hansen attributes a kind of sensitivity to data as such, a "datasense," "[thereby positioning] data-gathering as an independent producer of sensibility (causal efficacy) in its own right" (149). Hansen claims his project is based on a radicalization of Whitehead's theory of perception, in that he views Whitehead's more conservative account of concrescence as overprivileging the subject-pole of consciousness. Hansen vacillates between, on the one hand, emphasizing superjective transition over subjective concrescence and, on the other hand, emphasizing the need for a balance between speculative accounts of concrescence and empirical accounts of transition (93). On my reading, Whitehead does not privilege concrescence over transition, or subjective prehension over superjective expression. His cosmological scheme is an attempt at harmonizing the two principles characterizing reality's process, and his analogizing of philosophic method with the flight of an airplane suggests he also seeks a complementarity between the speculative and empirical approaches to grasping process (*PR* 5). Experience, in the most general or metaphysical terms, oscillates between the subjective concrescence of an actual occasion and the superjective transition between actual occasions. Experience ranges from that of microscopic quantum processes to that of macroscopic geological and cosmological processes (Hansen 14). Human experience is a meso-scale example of this panexperiential

oscillation. Whitehead and Hansen are in complete agreement on these issues.

Hansen claims he needs to “radicalize” Whitehead because he sees the latter as still too centered on human consciousness. According to Hansen, Whitehead betrays an anthropocentric residue when he defines causal efficacy merely in reference to the last tenth of a second of our human experience:

Whitehead’s . . . reductive rechristening of perception qua causal efficacy as “nonsensuous perception” . . . jettisons the crucial “vector character” of perception, the way lineages of causal efficacy stretch far into the background of perception, and not just to its most immediate just-past. . . . Whitehead effectively identifies causally efficacious perception with—and, I would argue, limits it to—the immediate past of sensory perception. (20–21, 24)

When read in its proper context, however, Whitehead is merely using our human experience of causal efficacy as a specific example of the way superjective expressions transition into subjective prehensions, an example close enough to home to allow us to grasp the generic nature of (nonhuman) causal relations: “In human experience, the most compelling example of non-sensuous perception is our knowledge of our own immediate past” (*AI*178). In the context of his metaphysical scheme, the example is generalized as an account of causal relations as such; that is, our nonsensuous perception of our own immediate past is imaginatively extended so as to characterize the becoming of actual occasions at every spatiotemporal scale. Whitehead warns us not to limit prematurely the reach of human experience, since under certain extreme circumstances (e.g., psychedelic journeying, near-death experience, flow states, technologically mediated experience of the sort Hansen explores in *Feed Forward*, etc.), the normal filters of consciousness are relaxed or perhaps eliminated altogether (*SP* 134–35). It could also be said that we become other-than-human during such extreme experiential episodes.

Early in his book, Hansen puts a definitional stake in the ground by referencing Husserl’s distinction between sensation and perception: “sensation [is] the nonintentional material on which perception, and intentionality, is erected’ (271n3). Hansen argues that Whitehead’s account of “nonsensuous perception” must be replaced with an account of “non-perceptual sensation” (19), but it seems that this is merely a definitional issue having to do with a difference in how Husserlian phenomenologists differentiate “sensation” from “perception.” Whitehead

explicitly acknowledges the lack of consistency in the philosophical tradition's various definitions of perception: modern empiricism suggests that perception always occurs through stimulation of the various sense-organs, but Whitehead argues that "there is a wider meaning" beyond this limited use of the term (*AI* 178). "Tacit identification of perception with sense-perception must be a fatal error barring the advance of systematic metaphysics" (*AI* 180). Whitehead's novel account of perception, or what I will refer to in what follows as "aesthesia" to avoid terminological confusion, distinguishes between two pure modes: causal efficacy and presentational immediacy. A third mixed mode is referred to as symbolic reference. Following Whitehead's distinction between these modes should make it clear that there is no need for the inversion Hansen has attempted, at least not if we are dealing with Whitehead's texts rather than those of his recent interpreters (who would appear to be the real target of Hansen's inversion).

It is all too easy to define *aesthesia* according to the misplaced concreteness, so prevalent among modern philosophers of both the empiricist and rationalist schools, which has it that our primary form of sensory experience is of bare patches of qualia free of all relations. Whitehead called this mode of *aesthesia* "presentational immediacy" or "sense-perception" and contrasted it with the more primordial mode of "causal efficacy" or "sense-reception" (*PR* 113–14). The latter mode of *aesthesia*, as its name suggests, directly links to and reiterates in our present experience the feelings of past actualities in our causal lineage. That present occasions of human experience are linked to past actualities via such causal lineages contradicts both the Humean dismissal of necessary connection and the Kantian transcendental paradigm, wherein *aesthesia* is "mere appearance" and therefore ontologically epiphenomenal. According to Whitehead, modern philosophers have explained experience in a "topsy-turvy fashion, the wrong end first": because presentational immediacy (i.e., a derivative appearance projected by the subject) provides us with clear and distinct ideas that are accessible to conceptualization by the understanding, it has been given genetic priority, when, in fact, causal efficacy (i.e., the primordial inheritance of superjective feelings) deserves this honor (*PR* 162). "The philosophy of organism is the inversion of Kant's philosophy," according to Whitehead, in that while Kant endeavors to construe experience as a process whereby "subjective data pass into the appearance of an objective world," Whitehead's philosophy of organism describes experience as a process whereby the order of the objectively felt data of

the world pass into and provide intensity for the realization of a subject (*PR* 88). In short, in Kant's philosophy, "the world emerges from the subject," while "for the philosophy of organism, the subject emerges from the world" (*PR* 88).

Rather than treating the objective world as an appearance constructed by subjective activity, as Kant and most other modern thinkers do, Whitehead reverses the direction of the process of *aesthesis* such that each subject is described as arising from its feelings of other objectified subjects, or superjects (*PR* 156). "In the place of the Hegelian [or Kantian] hierarchy of categories of thought, the philosophy of organism finds a hierarchy of feeling" (*PR* 166). On Whitehead's reading, Kant privileges *aesthesis* in the mode of presentational immediacy and ignores or at least marginalizes (by sequestering it within the inner intuition of the transcendental subject) the deeper and more ontologically relevant aesthetic mode of causal efficacy. Presentational immediacy displays reality in a way amenable to representational analysis, showing only the more or less clear and distinct surfaces of the world as they are presented to a seemingly transcendental subject here and now. It is the end product of a complex process of unconscious prehensive unification accomplished by the societal lineages of actual occasions composing our organism and nervous system. Causal efficacy unfolds behind the scenes of the Cartesian theater of presentational immediacy, hidden in the unrepresentable depths of reality responsible for carrying vague emotional vectors along a hierarchy of feeling from the past into the present. *Aesthesis* in the mode of presentational immediacy is punctual (hence its relative clarity and distinctness), while *aesthesis* in the mode of causal efficacy is transitional (hence its vagueness). Presentational immediacy allows for *intentional* consciousness, the subjective capacity for attentional directedness toward the *eidōs* of objects. Causal efficacy is *prehensional*, the presubjective process of inheriting the affective influences of superjects. The former mode implies a conscious mind remaining at a distance from nonconscious things, reflecting on their abstract essence rather than prehending their concrete expressiveness; the latter mode implies the interpenetration of experiential occasions, the transition from the superjective being of the past into the subjective becoming of the present. Whitehead's alchemical dissolution of consciousness plunges us below the phenomenal surface to reveal a deeper aesthetic relationality, a more primordial mode of experience that is shared in by every actuality in the cosmos. If anything is a priori, it is not transcendental structures

of human consciousness, as Kant argued, but descendent processes of cosmic prehensionality (Segall 143).

As we have seen, creative process is said to manifest in two ways, as the *concrecence* of each individual entity and as the *transition* from one occasion to the next. Concrecence describes “the real internal constitution of a particular existent,” while transition describes the perishing of a particular existent’s process, thereby “constituting that existent as an original element in the constitutions of other particular existences elicited by repetitions of process” (PR 210). “The transition is real, and the achievement is real. The difficulty is for language to express one of them without explaining away the other” (MT 102).

What Hansen refers to as “non-perceptual” or “worldly sensibility” (117) is akin to what I describe above in terms of “cosmic prehensionality.” Hansen’s reading of Whitehead as having compromised the more radical implications of his theory of *aesthesis* by describing it in terms of “non-sensuous perception” (116) appears to be no more than a terminological confusion. Hansen prefers to extend the meaning of “sensation” beyond the conscious perception of our sensory organs to include the nonconscious material sensibility of the world itself, while Whitehead restricts the meaning of “sensation” to precisely that mode of perception granted to higher organisms by their sensory organs. Removing this confusion shows how Hansen and Whitehead are largely in agreement regarding the derivative nature of human consciousness and the pervasiveness of the nonhuman forms of experience that constitute it. Hansen’s application of Whitehead’s panexperientialist ontology to media theory provides a striking example of the sort of new perspectives that are achievable once anthropocentrism has been overcome.

NOTES

1. Or perhaps this assumes too shallow an understanding of analogy, which is plenty cosmological already (in the Whiteheadian aesthetic sense), especially if, like McLuhan, we adopt the Thomist theory of analogical perception, wherein “the sensory order resonates with the divine Logos. . . . Analogy is not concept. It is community. It is resonance. It is inclusive. It is the cognitive process itself. That is the analogy of the divine Logos. . . . [I]mmediate analogical awareness . . . begins in the senses and is derailed by concepts or ideas” (McLuhan to John W. Mole, 18 Apr. 1969). In other words, perhaps analogical reasoning links us via perception/aesthesis to the cosmic logos.

2. Consider how Postman's criticisms of modern technology resemble the prophet Isaiah, "Their land is filled with idols; they bow down to the work of their hands" (2:8), or the prophet Jeremiah: "They burned incense to other gods and worshipped the works of their hands" (1:16).
3. While this article attempts to reconcile Hansen's and Whitehead's understandings of perception, there remains another area of disagreement for which reconciliation may not be possible: Hansen repudiates the eternity of Whitehead's eternal objects, and, as a consequence, rejects the role of God in Whitehead's metaphysical scheme (238). But due to the limitations of my medium, this topic must be left for a subsequent study.

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